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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

Does The Bible Really Say So?

Among the many problems facing the State of Israel is the status of the occupied territories on the West Bank. The Orthodox right, the *Gush Emunim* hold that the Torah is the basis for the claim to the greater Israel. Interestingly, in "The Torah and the West Bank," *Luke Lea* rebuts that argument from the text itself. Citing chapter and verse, he demonstrates that the grounds stated in the Torah for dispossessing the other inhabitants of the land do not apply today. Editorially, we remain objective, but we are sure that readers will find this new approach to the contentions of the *Gush Emunim* very thought-provoking.

The Individual and Revelation

Undoubtedly the basic issue in Jewish theological thought today is the theme of revelation. Not only does it distinguish the various movements in contemporary Judaism, but it is highly individual for thinkers in each group.

In his essay, "The Human Implications of Revelation," *David Wolpe* does not enter the theological arena in order to do battle for his specific reading of the concept. Instead, he offers a deeply affective presentation of his belief in revelation and the impact it has upon the human psyche.

"Folk" Judaism

One of the constant features of human psychology is the so-called "pendulum syndrome," the tendency to oscillate from one position to its opposite. During the century and a half since the birth of the modern "Science of Judaism" the rationalistic elements of Judaism attracted the greatest amount of interest, both among scholars and the general public; in our day, a reaction to this point of view has set in. It was largely initiated and is symbolized by the magisterial work of Gershom Scholem whose brilliant researches into the history of mysticism created virtually a new discipline.

Scholem has gone further. He has argued that it was the non-rational, mystical and messianic elements in the Jewish tradition and not the Halakhah or Jewish philosophy, biblical exegesis or Hebrew literature that were the decisive and life-giving factors in Jewish religion and history. This view has been recently criticized, I believe justly, by the Israeli thinker, Eliezer Schweid.

In his paper, "Transcendental and Folk Aspects of Judaism," *Edgar E. Siskin* argues for a balanced approach to both of these elements in Jewish life and tradition.

Who Is The "Real" King David?

"For all things there is a season," the biblical sage, Koheleth, said long ago. The truth of this statement would seem to be borne out by one aspect of our recent editorial experience. In the Spring 1986 issue of JUDAISM we published a biography of King David, a secular point of view, by Jack Cargill.

A few months earlier, the well-known novelist, Joseph Heller published an irreverent treatment of King David entitled, *God Knows*. The work attracted considerable attention, much of it highly negative because of the author's approach to the personal life of the great king who conquered Jerusalem, laid the foundations of the Jewish state, became "the sweet singer of Israel" as the author of Psalms, and is the ancestor and prototype of the Messiah.

A spirited defense of Joseph Heller and his treatment of David is presented by *John Friedman* and *Judith Ruderman* in their paper, "Joseph Heller and the 'Real' King David." The authors of the essay insist that what Heller has done is to strip away the layers of pious Midrash that have obscured the "real" David. By painting in all his warts that are part of the human condition, Heller has brought his David closer to ourselves.

In "Tell It Not In Gath," *Bernhard Frank* offers a poetic dialogue between David and his friend, Jonathan, which presents still another aspect of the "real" man behind the royal personage.

Distressing Aspects of Jewish History

The basic truth in *Stephen J. Whitfield's* paper, "Jewish History and the Torment of Totalitarianism," is to be found in the first sub-caption — "the ubiquity of anti-Semitism." That is an inexorable fact which we cannot avoid and Prof. Whitfield analyses it, using as his prime initial examples the cases of Jacobo Timerman and Anatoly Scharansky. He goes on to discuss the Jewish protest against totalitarianism and, in their human frailty, the instances of those who cooperated with the oppressors.

If one were to ask "where is it good for the Jews?" the only answer would seem to be: in a free and democratic world.

Hold On To Your Hat

In a very personal vein, *Julian Ungar-Sargon* describes both the spiritual agony and the physical embarrassment he encountered because of his wearing the yarmulka under any and all circumstances. His brief paper, "The Agony of the Yarmulka," belongs to a literary genre made famous by the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and Rousseau, among others. If we read the text right, the author has finally resolved his doubts and difficulties and the story ends on a happy note.

Wisdom Is Not Docile

In the inexhaustible treasure house which is the Bible, Wisdom literature occupies a unique place. Embodied principally, but not completely, in the books of *Proverbs*, *Job* and *Koheleth*, Wisdom may be described in a thumb-nail definition as the application of intelligence to the problem of life and its meaning.

It is widely assumed that while *Proverbs* adopts an affirmative stance on the question as to the meaning of life, *Job* and *Koheleth* deny the existence of such a pattern. This contention is refuted by *Karl A. Plank* in his paper, "Raging Wisdom: A Banner of Defiance Unfurled." He maintains that the passionate protest of *Job*, as well as the skeptical observations of *Koheleth*, are no less dedicated to the quest for cosmic order than is the practical-minded sage in *Proverbs*.

The depth and complexity of these biblical masterpieces lend themselves to a vast variety of readings among which Plank's is a highly moving, example.

Does God Change His Mind?

What happens, in the Bible, when God commands a procedure? One would assume that the commanded proceeds to act upon the word of God. On what basis would he do otherwise? Does a prophet always say and do as he is told? We know that there were times when he did not. Do God's predictions always come true? Not always.

These apparent challenges to the authority of the word of God are analysed by *Benjamin Edidin Scolnic* in a paper whose title indicates his view of divine speech — "The Flexible Word of God: Insights on the Other Pole of Authority." The word of God is *not* rigid.

There Is Another World Out There

In addition to the well-trodden highways of Jewish literature — the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash, medieval Jewish philosophy, and modern literature — there are also interesting by-ways with a charm and fascination of their own.

Recently there has been a marked growth of interest in mysticism

and the occult in contemporary society, amply reflected in the Jewish community as well. As a result, the role of the supernatural has been attracting considerable attention from many points of view, including the paper in this issue by Edgar E. Siskin.

In his paper, "Jewish Tales of the Supernatural," *Howard Schwartz* offers a comprehensive survey of the place occupied by legends and folk beliefs both in classic Jewish literature as well as in popular writings through the ages. He offers a fascinating insight into an aspect of the Jewish psyche that has long been overlooked.

We Are Responsible For All Others

One of the striking developments in the inner life of contemporary Jewry has been its growing parochialization — its concentration on Jewish issues and its lack of concern for broader social problems affecting the entire community. This attitude is sometimes justified on the ground that since the *goyim* were unconcerned by the horror of the Holocaust, there is no reason for Jews to be interested in "their" problems. This rationale conveniently loses sight of two facts: first, their problems are ours, and, second, the narrowing of focus among Jews is a distortion of the basic character of Judaism itself. One has only to read the Book of Jonah for proof.

Fortunately, all things change. Whatever tides of attitude and feeling prevail at one moment will give way to opposite positions sooner or later. Change is the only certainty in human affairs.

There is now good news from Canada. In his paper, "The Covenantal Drama: Act Two Begins," *William Abrams*, a lay leader of Canadian Jewry, informs us that new winds are blowing in his country. There is a growing chorus of voices among Canadian Jews calling for involvement in issues of justice and equity affecting society as a whole and transcending the special interests of the Jewish community. Is this new trend the harbinger of a new day for American Jewry as well?

Are Jewish Lawyers Really Public Spirited?

In the January, 1986 issue of JUDAISM we printed an article by *Donna Arzt* in which she made a strong case for the public-spiritedness of Jewish lawyers. She, herself, is a perfect example of it, being involved in defending human rights both here and in Israel.

No sooner had the paper appeared than we got a rejoinder to it from *Jerold S. Auerbach*, a professor of history at Wellesley College. In "Prophets or Profits, Liberal Lawyers and Jewish Tradition," he negates the major contentions made by Ms. Arzt and argues that many Jewish public interest lawyers are totally removed from any positive identification with Jews or Judaism. Even more fundamentally, he denies any connection

between the Jewish tradition and the quest for social justice in general and American liberalism in particular.

The Auerbach paper and Ms. Arzt's rebuttal, "In Defense of Jewish Public Interest Lawyers," are not parts of a formal debate, though some of our readers may decide to take sides. Others may be like the wise Hasidic rebbe who was asked to make a judgment and who concluded, "You're both right."

Smoothing Christian-Jewish Relationships

One of the developments in our day has been an increasing awareness of the "Jewishness" of Christianity — certainly in its roots and the early formative stages. And, similarly, there is much study of the contemporary relationship of Christianity to Jews and Judaism. These matters are dealt with in two excellent review-essays, one by the late *Phillip J. Sigal* and the other by *Robert A. Everett*.

The first, "New Light on the Early Years of Christianity," deals with two books, one for the scholar and the other for the layperson. They consider the personality of Jesus and the history of the years after him, when the Church was groping towards formation. The second review-essay, "Handling the Anti-Semitism of the New Testament," indicates the problems involved for intelligent Christians of good will in transcending the hate which has disfigured the Christian world for twenty centuries. Norman Beck, the author of the book, *Mature Christianity*, suggests procedures to be followed in defusing, if not eliminating, the impact of these passages on the consciousness and the conscience of Christians.

R.G.

NOTICE TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

We regret that soaring costs compel us to increase the price of subscriptions for JUDAISM.

Beginning with Jan. 1, 1988, the rates will be as follows:

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The Torah and the West Bank

LUKE LEA

OF ALL THE CLAIMS TO THE WEST BANK AND Gaza put forward by the right-wing parties in Israel today, none has seemed more difficult to answer than the Biblical one. Little wonder that they use it so often. Thus, Gush Emunim ("The Bloc of the Faithful"), which has played a crucial part in spearheading the West Bank settlements, justifies its role with the argument that the Torah gives Israel an unconditional title to the land of greater Israel (*Erez Israel*), including all of the territories occupied in the Six Day War. More recently, Rabbi (and now Knesset member) Meir Kahane and his Kach party have gone even further; they advocate, in the name of Orthodoxy, expelling the Palestinians from their homes on the West Bank (indeed, from throughout Israel) into Jordan or whatever country will have them. And, as Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon showed all along, the names "Judea and Samaria" have cast a spell over the uncritical masses who are a primary constituency of the Likud coalition.

The proponents of territorial compromise, by contrast, have thus far been content to rest their case on what, in their own view, are the perfectly adequate grounds of fairness and the long-term interests of the state: internally for democracy, and externally for peace with Israel's neighbors. What is more, the leaders of the peace movement (as they will be the first to admit) are not really conversant with the governing religious texts in this matter. Neither do they care to be — an attitude that springs, no doubt, from the deep sense of aversion that many of them must feel, as intellectuals, to the whole Orthodox enterprise of bibliolatry (or rather Torah-olatry) with its sacerdotalism and fetishism of the texts. As secularly educated individuals they are repelled by the posture of superstitious awe. The result, however, is a curious one for intellectuals. They refuse to debate the meaning of a book. And not just any book, but one that is, by all accounts, a primary document of Western culture and civilization. Rather than engage zealots in controversy over the interpretation of Scriptures, they prefer to remain silent. And so they allow the Biblical claim to pass unchallenged.

But in ceding this point the doves are committing a serious tactical error. I say this partly because, in a closely contested parliamentary system such as Israel's, every segment of opinion holds the balance of power. Even a comparatively minor shift could — and some day very well may —

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prove decisive in the final disposition of the occupied territories. Hence, no stone should be left unturned. But there is an even more important reason why the Orthodox right needs to be challenged on the question of the territories. A close, critical reading of the Torah reveals that no such unqualified or exclusive claim to the West Bank and Gaza (or to any other part of *Erez Israel* for that matter) can be made. Here I want to review what the relevant texts do say, for the benefit of readers who may be unfamiliar with them.

I

The first thing to note is how little there is in the Talmud or in the responsa literature that bears on the issue. While this might seem surprising at first sight, the reason is not far to find. It follows from the fact that this enormous — and enormously complex — body of literature (over fifty million words) arose long after the ancient Hebrews had settled the historic land of Israel. By its very nature, the oral law (halakhah) deals with the application of the written law to situations that were met in the periods that produced it. The great bulk of the halakhic tradition, consequently, reflects the problems and circumstances that were current in the period of the Second Temple and during the more than two thousand years of the Diaspora. This much is commonplace. Furthermore, throughout the whole of this immensely long era of rabbinic Judaism there was simply no occasion — does anyone dispute it? — on which the Jewish people had to confront the question before them today: namely, *by what principles are they, as Jews, to conduct themselves upon entering the promised land, in relation to the native inhabitants of the land who are living there before them?*¹

To say the least, this simplifies our task. For it means that, with minor exceptions*, only the written Torah — the five books of Moses — relates to the question. And of these five books, Genesis, clearly, has the first claim on our attention. Not so much because it is the first book of the Torah, but because in it we find, spelled out for the first time in the so-called patriarchal narratives,² the nature of the covenant between God

1. The only possible exception would have occurred circa 538 B.C.E., when Cyrus the Great ended the Babylonian captivity (which lasted a total of 48 years) and allowed the Jews held captive in Babylon to return to Judah to rebuild the Temple. It is generally thought, however, that only the upper classes had been carried off into exile in the first place, and that the land itself had remained in the hands of lower class Jews who had been left behind. In any event, history records no outside opposition to the exiles upon their return to their homes. See *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson (Harvard University Press, 1976) pp. 160-162.

*For the exceptions, which generally support the conclusions below, see *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, Vol. II, by J. David Bleich (KTAV, 1983), Chapter IX. See also *Religious Zionism: Challenges and Choices* (OZ VeSHALOM PUBLICATIONS, English Language Series #1).

2. Genesis 11:27-35:39. The established academic view, dating from mid-century and

and Abraham, including the conditions of the promise whereby Abraham and his descendants are to find a new home for themselves in Palestine. As we shall see, nothing that happens later on Mt. Sinai nullifies — or in anyway contradicts — what is written in Genesis. (Indeed, Orthodox tradition maintains that the book of Genesis itself was handed down by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai along with the other four books of the Pentateuch.)

What, then, does Genesis have to say? Three or four different things, as it turns out.

To begin with, at the very outset of the patriarchal narratives, when Abraham and his household are still in Mesopotamia, we read a straightforward promise from God to Abraham with no apparent conditions attached, beyond a simple going into the land:

Now the Lord has said unto Abram [Abraham], "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee I will curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-4).

(Notice, incidentally, the universal element that is present in the promise from the very beginning: not only will Abraham be "blessed" and "be a blessing" but in him "shall all the families of the earth be blessed.")

Abraham then journeys together with Lot, his brother's son, and their two families into Palestine, where God's promise is repeated, this second time in terms suggestive of a proud new landowner initially surveying his domain:

And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from

based largely on William F. Albright's sifting of the archeological and textual evidence, upholds in general terms the historicity of the patriarchal age. More specifically, it holds that the patriarchal narratives, while written late, were originally oral traditions of the ancient Hebrews — a stateless, pre-literate tribe of West Semitic stock who immigrated into Palestine from Mesopotamia some time in the first half of the second millenium B.C.E.. See, for example, the new *Cambridge Ancient History* (University of Cambridge Press, 1970). Lately, however, these conclusions have come under challenge by biblical scholars who maintain that, at best, Albright establishes a plausibility, not a probability. They prefer the German hypothesis popular a century ago, according to which the patriarchal narratives were manufactured out of whole cloth very late in Israel's history (after the Babylonian exile) and were retrojected into a mythological, pre-Mosaic age. See *Abraham in History and Tradition* by John Van Seeters, (Yale University Press, 1975) and *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* by Thomas L. Thompson (Walter de Gruyter, 1974). Be that as it may, it is important to emphasize that the dispute is not material to the issue at hand, for the present essay rests, finally, on nothing more than a close, critical reading of the actual texts as we find them today. Consequently, it is unaffected by all questions of provenance. Nevertheless, for purposes of exposition, I have followed the established academic opinion which upholds the historicity of the patriarchal age; whether or not my argument adds to the plausibility of that hypothesis I will leave it for the experts to decide.

him, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward;

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for unto thee will I give it"(Genesis 13:14-17).

There follow a series of incidents, including a curious episode between Abraham and the kings of Salem and Sodom to which I shall return, after which God's promise is repeated yet again, only in this instance in maximalist terms, and again without any apparent qualification or condition:

And that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

As we continue further in the narratives, however, something distinctly new begins to appear. We encounter, for the first time, a series of qualifications to the covenant, in which God's promise to Abraham assumes the form of a bilateral contract — that is, is made conditional upon the performance of certain commandments (*mizvot*) to be kept by Abraham and his descendants. At one point in the 18th chapter, for example, we read that the rite of circumcision is to be both identical with, and "a token of," the covenant:

"This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised.

And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt Me and you" (Genesis 17:10-11).

Finally, something that is potentially of great significance for us here, at two other points in the narratives we encounter what, for the moment, can only be described as obscure ethical injunctions attached to the covenant. The first occurs in the 17th chapter, immediately preceeding the injunction of circumcision cited above.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be thou whole-hearted [Hebrew *tamim*, also translated as "perfect"] and I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly" (Genesis 17:1-2).

(Note, by the way, the preambular form of this fragment, which suggests that it may be the earliest one in the group.) The second instance, similar except for tense and mood, occurs in the 18th chapter:

"For I [the Lord] have known him [Abraham], to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice [Hebrew *zedeq*]; to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19).

Immediately we confront a classic problem of biblical interpretation: How to reconcile different descriptions of what purports to be a single, everlasting covenant between God and the Jewish people? One approach, long favored by the fundamentalist mind, is simply to quote the particular verse or verses that suit one's purposes (taking them completely out of context if necessary) and to ignore the rest. But, while convenient, this approach unfortunately itself violates a fundamental injunction of the Torah: not to take away from, nor to add to, anything in it (Deuteronomy 4:2, 13:1). A second, not unrelated approach is the one favored by many on the left today, who blandly assert that the Torah is inconsistent on the issue of the covenant and that one can support contradictory positions with carefully chosen citations. In view of the antics of Gush Emunim, Kach and their like, this position has a certain surface plausibility. But, nonetheless, so far as the issue before us is concerned, it makes an assumption of the fact which may or may not be true: that the various passages of the Torah describing the conditions of the covenant are self-contradictory and cannot be reconciled.

A third approach frankly admits that we are dealing with a primitive text here which, for whatever reasons,³ does not progress linearly but, rather, circles around its object and gradually defines what it is trying to say. Thus, for instance, if at one point we read X and at another point Y, then unless X and Y are mutually exclusive (in which case the text is absurd and the second approach wins) the meaning is X *and* Y, or X modified by Y. This agrees with the Talmudic maxim that "there is no earlier or later in the Torah" (*Pesahim 7b*); in other words, all of its meanings are to be read simultaneously. It also happens to be the only intellectually honest approach, in the sense of being the only approach that allows for the possibility of the Torah's being a meaningful and self-consistent whole on the subject of the covenant, while also leaving room for the possibility of its being absurd and self-contradictory. The third approach is the one that we will take.

II

Let us go back, then, and look more closely at the two words *tamim* and *zedeq* that were introduced in the quotations above and at the way they are used to define the conditions of the covenant — that is, the terms that Abraham and his descendants were to fulfill as their part of the bargain so that God, in turn, would fulfill His:

3. Since Wellhausen, the scholarly consensus has been that the book of Genesis is, together with the rest of the Torah, a highly composite text woven out of various strands — the so-called J, E, P, D codes, etc. — which were written down separately and then redacted by various hands over a period of centuries. See, e.g., the article "Genesis" by O. Eissfeldt in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.

"Be thou whole-hearted [*tamim*]. And I will make my covenant between me and thee. . . ." (Genesis 17:1-2).

". . . do righteousness and justice [*zedek*] to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken. . . ." (Genesis 18:19).

Originally, the Hebrew word *tamim* meant "whole" and *zedek* meant "hard", "straight", "rigid".⁴ From very early on, and throughout the Bible, we find these two words used to describe the proper conditions of the weights and balances that were used in ancient commerce to measure commodities. A proper weight was *tamim* — i.e. whole, complete, not lacking; a proper balance beam was *zedek* — i.e., straight, true, rigid. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 25:13-15, Leviticus 19:36, Micah 6:11, Amos 8:5. and elsewhere.) The reason for the *tamim* of the weights is, of course obvious; the use of short weights would be tantamount to cheating the party with whom one was dealing. As for the *zedek* of the balance beam, the following technical observation is perhaps in order:

[F]or the justness of an equal armed balance it is requisite. . . [t]hat the two points of suspension of the pans from the beam be in exactly the same line as the center of motion of the fulcrum on which the beam turns when set in motion. The line joining these three points is the axis of the beam.⁵

So, by metaphorical extension — or is it literal interpretation? — the terms of the covenant can be reduced to fair dealing. Abraham and his descendants are to treat honestly and fairly with those whom they encounter in the promised land if they are to find there a new home for themselves in which to live out their lives in peace and prosperity.

This interpretation gathers plausibility when we examine it against the sociological background of the patriarchal age. Thus, even though, as I have noted, some experts dispute it, both the established academic view and the Torah itself agree on the point that, before Moses, the ancient Hebrews were a stateless, semi-nomadic people who migrated to Palestine sometime in the first half of the second millenium B.C.E.. Like all such pastoral peoples in the ancient Near East, and the Semitic peoples especially, they did not dwell in splendid isolation off by themselves, together with their flocks and their gold. On the contrary, they existed in a close symbiotic relationship with the surrounding agricultural states, among which they lived and moved and had their being. In *Ancient Iraq*, the eminent French sumerologist, Georges Roux, has reconstructed a picture of life in those days:

Before that time, i.e., before the introduction of the camel around 1200 B.C., which made long-distance travel possible, the nomads, who rode on asses and practiced sheep-rearing, were much more restricted in their movements than the bedouins of today and could not wander far beyond the limits of the grassy steppe which extends between the Tigris and Euphr-

4. William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Houghton Mifflin, 1906).

5. Bruno Kish, *Scales and Weights: An Historical Outline*, (Yale University Press, 1965), p.32.

rates and at the foot of the Zagros, the Taurus and the Lebanon. There they were in close and constant touch with the agricultural populations which bought their sheep and supplied them with grain, dates, tools, weapons, and other utilitarian objects and amenities. . . . In general the two groups met regularly in villages or in market-places outside the gates of the cities, and exchanged goods, together, no doubt, with a number of ideas. Then the nomads returned to the steppe, perhaps only a few miles away. Occasionally, individuals left the tribe as Lot did in Sodom to find work in the towns as mercenaries, craftsmen, or merchants. Sometimes a family, a clan, or a whole tribe would acquire (or be granted) land and devote itself partly to agriculture, partly to sheep-breeding. Not infrequently the local governments exercised some control over the nomads, using them in particular as auxiliary troops whenever required.⁶

Commercial intercourse, in other words, played an integral part in the livelihood of the nomadic peoples of the ancient Near East. It follows that, to a very considerable degree, they depended for their welfare and survival upon the good-will of their agricultural hosts with whom they had an on-going exchange. This was part — the peaceful part — of the age-old relationship between the Steppe and the Sown.

In the case of Abraham and his descendants, the situation was made still more precarious by the fact of their having left the traditional home of their ancestors in Mesopotamia, where, in time of trouble, they could expect to find allies among their own kith and kin. Having moved to Palestine, they traded in this security and became, instead, “strangers in a strange land.” Indeed, it is an old scholarly conjecture that the word, “Hebrew,” itself, may be derived from the ancient Semitic word *hapiru*, meaning “stranger” or “foreigner.” But be that as it may, it is easy to see why the ancient Hebrews in the patriarchal age should find the strongest practical motive for straight-dealing with the settled agricultural peoples among whom they lived. Any attempt to cheat or defraud their hosts — as by short weights, for example — was bound to arouse hostility and prove counter-productive in the long-run.

Illustrative is an episode recorded in the 34th chapter of Genesis. Jacob and his household are dwelling peacefully among the Hivites in the land of Canaan when the son of the king of the Hivites seduces Jacob's daughter and falls in love with her. He wants to marry her and asks his father to ask Jacob for her hand. The latter does so and, at the same time, extends an open invitation to Jacob and all of his household to intermarry with, and live permanently among, the Hivites as one people. The sons of Jacob, who are outraged that the Hivite prince has defiled their sister, reply that this is possible only on the condition that all the male Hivites agree to be circumcised. The Hivites agree and are duly circumcised; but, on the third day afterward, when they are still sore from the operation, the sons of Jacob “deceitfully” fall upon them and slay them, carrying off

6. Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (Penguin Books, 1966) p. 138.

all of their wives, children, and possessions. When Jacob learns of this treachery, he exclaims:

“Ye have troubled me, to make me odious unto the inhabitants of the land, even unto the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and, I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me and smight me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house” (Genesis 34:30).

In sum, it was perfectly natural for the small tribe of Hebrews who were migrating along the arc of the Fertile Crescent in the second millennium B.C.E., to find in the *tamim* of the weights and the *zedeq* of the balance beam the ideal image of a wise foreign policy. Being stateless, “few in number,” and shorn of reliable allies, their reputation for integrity and straight-dealing was, for them, the very touchstone of survival. It was the special genius of Abraham — or whoever was responsible for the Abrahamic legends — to take this idea a step further and proclaim a Most High God (“maker of heaven and earth”) who was likewise “just” (Genesis 18:25); who judged all people everywhere by the standards of justice (Genesis 18:20-33); and who, in His capacity as just judge of the earth, watched over Abraham and his descendants as their shield and protector (Genesis 15:5). (Incidentally, this helps shed light on an historical riddle: How was it that a tiny, insignificant people like the ancient Hebrews should have their peculiar conception of God taken up by the peasant and proletarian masses of the Roman Empire and, later, throughout the whole Western world? The answer would seem to lie, at least in part, in the fact that, like the ancient Hebrews, common people everywhere were exposed to the depredations of powers and principalities and found in the Bible the only organized body of belief — before Marxism, at any rate — which systematically championed the interests of the poor, the weak, the defenseless, and the oppressed.)

Lending substance to this interpretation of the covenant is the actual behavior of Abraham and his household upon entering the promised land. For, as recounted in Genesis, we find them there putting into practice those self-same principles of equity and fair-dealing with the native inhabitants whom they meet.

The first example, to which I have already alluded, occurs in the 14th chapter in an episode known as the war of the four kings against the five. In the course of this war the city of Sodom is sacked and Lot, Abraham’s brother who was living in Sodom, is taken away captive along with many others. When Abraham hears of this he sets out with three hundred and eighteen men from his camp in pursuit of the plunderers, with whom he catches up and whom he defeats in battle near Damascus. (This incident, by the way, belies the notion sometimes advanced that Abraham was a pacifist.) Returning home with Lot and the other captives and booty that were taken from Sodom, Abraham is met by the kings of Sodom and Salem along the way in the vale of Shaveh. Significantly, the king of Salem (on the West Bank, possibly Jerusalem?) is named Melchizedek (literally,

“the king is justice”) and is described as a priest of God Most High, like the God of Abraham. Melchizedek blesses Abraham in the name of God Most High, “Maker of heaven and earth,” “who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand,” and gives him a tithe. Whereupon the king of Sodom goes further and offers to let Abraham keep all of the goods that were taken out of his city and asks only for the return of the human captives. Abraham rejects this offer out of hand, explaining:

“I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord, God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread nor a shoe-latchet nor aught that is thine, lest thou shouldest say: I have made Abram rich” (Genesis 14:22-23).

(Notice the past tense of the oath: not “I lift up” but “I have lifted up” my hand unto the Lord, indicating that this is but the particular application of a more general oath which has already been taken in the past.)

A second, even more telling incident is recorded in the 21st chapter of Genesis. It takes place between Abraham and a king of Gerar (from near Gaza) named Abimelech. The place is Beersheba. Because of its centrality to the argument which I am making, as well as the economy of the narrative, I will quote it in full:

And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol the captain of his host spoke unto Abraham, saying: “God is with thee in all that thou doest. *Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son’s son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and unto the land wherein thou hast sojourned.*” And Abraham said: “I will swear.”

And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of the well of water, which Abimelech’s servants had violently taken away. And Abimelech said: “I know not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but today.”

And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and they two made a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe-lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said unto Abraham: “What mean these seven ewe lambs, which thou has set by themselves?” And he said: “Verily, these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that it may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well.”

Wherefore that place was called Beersheba; because there they sware both of them. So they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech rose up, and Phicol the captain of the host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines.

And Abraham planted a tamarisk-tree in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God (Genesis 21:22-33)[*italics added*].

What we are witnessing here at Beersheba — which, if tradition be right, took place nearly four millenia ago — is more than just an early formulation of the golden rule. In the annals of international law it must be counted as, if not the earliest example on record, then, certainly, the earliest example on *continuous* record of two peoples attempting to substitute principles of justice and equity in the place of force and violence as the means of settling international disputes. Together with the other

materials that are found in Genesis, it contains the seeds of that universalistic, ethical core of the ancient Hebrew faith which is its root idea and gives to it a world-historical importance. It is, quite simply, where Judaism begins.

III

But, then, what are we to make of Yahweh, God of battles, and the whole bloody saga of Israel's history that starts in Exodus?

For, as every schoolchild knows, when the Israelites re-enter the promised land for the second time after being led out of Egypt under Moses, they do so in a manner which is diametrically the opposite of Abraham's. This time arms, not treaties, are the order of the day. Who can forget the story of Joshua blowing down the walls of Jericho, of David killing Goliath with his sling, or of Samson slaying the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass? And let us not forget the reason why Moses and the children of Israel were condemned to wander forty years in the wilderness, in the first place. It was specifically and solely because they refused to fight the Anakites when God commanded them to do so (Numbers 13-14).

Alas, it is true, and there is no use denying it. From Exodus on we find the Torah explicitly and repeatedly warning the Israelites *not* to make covenants with the native inhabitants of Palestine. Instead, they are to go in fighting and "The Lord, The Lord God" who is "A Man of War" will "drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite" (Exodus 33:2).

Now there is a natural temptation at this point to resort once more to a sociological interpretation. It might be conjectured, for example, that in the days of Abraham the Hebrews were weak and "few in number" and Palestine was a lightly populated region with ample room for newcomers. *Tamim* and *zedeq* made sense then. But, by the time of Moses — more than four centuries later, according to Exodus — the number and strength of the Israelites was reportedly much greater, measuring in the thousands instead of the hundreds. Possibly the demographic situation in Palestine may have likewise altered for the worse. In that case, there may have been no room for a peaceful incursion of new settlers into the area. In such circumstances — and assuming, as seems probable from everything else that we know about the history of warring states in ancient times, a Hobbesean world of all against all — it is quite conceivable that military force was the only way in.

But however tempting — or even true — this hypothesis may happen to be, it is important to realize that it has nothing to do with the reason that the Torah gives for the change in policy. The Torah, is by definition, a book of religious instruction; sociological interpretations, therefore, can have no standing in it. Accordingly it should come as no surprise to learn

that the reason which the Torah states for Israel's dispossessing the native inhabitants of the promised land are purely religious in nature. But what exactly are they?

Before we see, I want to dispose of a canard that we are sure to meet. Rabbinic tradition has long held that the revelation on Mt. Sinai contains the whole of the law. We should not dispute it. However, there is no warrant in this (or in Rabbinic tradition) for concluding that the covenant on Mt. Sinai somehow cancels or replaces — rather than qualifies and expands — God's covenant with Abraham "and his seed after him" as described in the patriarchal narratives. We can say this despite the fact that, at one point, in Deuteronomy 5:3, we read that the covenant which God made on Mt. Sinai with the children of Israel is "not" the same covenant that God made with "our fathers" (immediately after which there follows an enumeration of the ten commandments, none of which are found in Genesis). On what evidence can we claim that the covenant on Mt. Sinai does not nullify or supersede the covenant in Genesis, but, rather, modifies and extends it?

On ample evidence. To begin with, there is the fact to which I have already alluded, that Genesis is itself part of the Torah and as such must be included in the covenant on Mt. Sinai.⁷ In a similar vein, we know that the covenant with Abraham is described by the Torah as "everlasting" (Hebrew, *olam*) on at least three occasions (Genesis 17:7, 17:13, 17:19). To describe it as everlasting at one point and then to void it soon after, involves a contradiction. But even more to the point, we find that throughout the last four books of Moses the covenant with Abraham is reaffirmed on at least a dozen different occasions. (See, for example, Exodus 2:24, Leviticus 26:42, Numbers 32:11, and Deuteronomy 9:5.) These citations by themselves are enough to prove that God's covenant with Abraham does not assume the status of a dead letter in the final four books of the Torah. Now, it is true, the majority of these verses speak only of the promises rather than of the covenant as a whole. This might lead one to suppose that it is only the promises that are everlasting, not the conditions (*mizvot*) which are attached to the promises. But against this we can point to the fact that the specific *mizvot* which are prescribed in Genesis are repeated again. The commandment of circumcision re-occurs in Leviticus 12:3, where it takes its place alongside the ten commandments as well as numerous other *mizvot* not found in Genesis. Finally, the point that concerns us here, the commandment of *zedeq* itself re-occurs, emphatically, in Deuteronomy as a *mizvah* attached directly and explicitly to the promises:

7. Cf. the midrash on the question: "Why is Genesis included in the Torah?" Nachmanides's answer was that Genesis was included to show that God's promises to Israel were conditional and not absolute. See *Religious Zionism: Challenges and Choices* (OZ VeSHALOM PUBLICATIONS, English Language Series #1) pp. 23, 35-36.

Justice, Justice(*zedeq, zedeq*) shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Deuteronomy 16:20).

We are on firm ground, therefore, in maintaining that the Sinaitic covenant in no way replaces the Abrahamic one. Instead, it complements and extends it. The old promises and the old *mizvot* remain, and to them new *mizvot* are added. If we must delineate the differences between them, they are differences of logic and scope. With Abraham the focus is almost exclusively on the realm of foreign affairs. Principles are set forth which are to guide the tiny tribe of Hebrews in its dealings with the other tribes around it. With Moses, by contrast, the emphasis shifts to the intra-communal or domestic side of the equation. He sets forth rules to regulate the life of the newly re-constituted tribe of Israel in all its internal affairs. "Observe the Sabbath," "Honor thy father and mother," "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor," "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house," and so forth. In the most basic terms: Abraham was a visionary in the field of international relations, Moses was a nation builder. And, as has happened on more than one occasion since in the history of institutions, it is the routinizer who eclipses the founder: the figure with the organizational genius comes gradually to overshadow the figure with the original germ of inspiration.

But if we are justified in maintaining that the *mizvah* of *zedeq* is not repealed by the covenant on Mt. Sinai, we are back to the question I posed above: On what grounds were the Israelites under Moses allowed — indeed, commanded by God — to dispossess the native inhabitants of the promised land who were living there before them?

The answer appears many times in the last four books of Moses, where it is always explicit and everywhere the same. Quite simply, it was because the seven nations that were in the land in the time of Moses were pagans. That is, unlike Abimelech and Melchizedek in Genesis, they did not profess the God of Abraham. Instead, they bowed down before graven images, worshipped idols, and engaged in all manner of occult practices. The following two passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy are representative:

"Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest they be for a snare in the midst of thee. But ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and ye shall cut down their Asherim. For thou shalt bow down to no other god; for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:12-14).

And again:

When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one that useth divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or one that consulteth a ghost or a familiar spirit, or a necromancer. For whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto

the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God is driving them out from before thee (Deuteronomy 18:9-12).

(See also Exodus 23:23-33, Numbers 33:50-56, Deuteronomy 7:1-5, 12:29-32, 20:16-18, etc..) These, then, were the offenses, this the wickedness, of which they were guilty — and nothing more! (The only possible exceptions are certain sexual practices detailed in the 18th chapter of Leviticus.) And for these “abominations,” according to the stern ethic of the Torah, they deserved to die: to be wiped out, exterminated, and expelled from the land. But note, the Torah is commendably symmetrical on the issue: any Israelite who follows “after strange gods” is likewise to be killed (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). If the people as a whole stray from their exclusive allegiance to God and His commandments, then they will be treated to the same terrible fate at the hands of the Israelites (Leviticus 26:15-20). So militant monotheism — or, rather, strictly speaking, militant monolatry — is the Torah’s justification for aggression in the promised land.

Thus we arrive at a paradox. The same Hebrew people who introduced into Western world the idea of justice as the supreme ethical ideal governing human relationships — and who, for a fit foundation to support that ideal, proclaimed the essential unity and equality of all humankind — this same people, at a somewhat later date, pioneered in the ways of religious intolerance with extreme prejudice. (Which intolerance, it is only fair to add, was subsequently taken up with gusto by Christians and Moslems alike.) Human beings having been created in the image of God, the Mosaic inference seemed to be that only those who recognized God were fully human. In short, the Torah makes monolatry the criterion for covenant-making with the native inhabitants of the promised land. Only with those peoples (*goyim*) who professed a strict and exclusive worship of the God of Abraham could Jews substitute a principled relationship of peace and equity in the place of violence and treachery. Those who lacked this monolatry lacked the indispensable basis in belief — “the fear of God” (Hebrew *yirah*, literally “reverence”, see Genesis 20:11) — to enter into such a relationship. They were “heathens,” “idolators”: in effect, uncivilized barbarians, to be shown but little mercy.

Regardless of what one thinks nowadays about such “lesser breeds without the law,” it is a moot point in the case at hand. For there can be no question that the Palestinian people today are free from any taint of paganism or idolatry. Ninety-five percent of the population are Moslem and the other five percent Christian. In both cases — and especially with the Moslems — we find an explicit and exclusive monotheism derived directly from Judaism. The God of Abraham is the only God whom the Palestinian people recognize. Neither is the native population given to occult practices: Islamic monotheism is pure to the point of austerity. It follows, then, that the grounds stated in the Torah on the basis of which Jews were allowed — indeed, commanded — to dispossess the native

inhabitants of the promised land, do not apply. On the contrary, in this situation the Torah would seem to instruct just the opposite: that Jews are duty bound to make a mutually acceptable peace treaty with the Palestinian people of today, based on principles of justice and equity and a common belief in the God of Abraham. The only pre-condition, albeit an exceedingly crucial one, is that the Palestinian people must — “in the name of Allah” — be prepared to do likewise.

So, irony of ironies, it turns out that the moderates in Israel today who urge the course of peace through territorial compromise and base their case on an intuitive sense of what is right and just regarding the Palestinian issue, are, in actuality, pursuing the true orthodox position. Those hawks and so-called “Orthodox” parties on the other hand, who argue on the basis of short-run defense needs and advance blind, uncritical claims to “Judea and Samaria,” are the real traducers of the Law. If anyone can find anything anywhere in the Torah or the Talmud that contradicts this conclusion, let them produce it now for everyone to see.

The Human Implications of Revelation

DAVID WOLPE

THE CENTRAL FACT IS SINGLENESSE. EACH day a thousand thoughts, aspirations, impressions which cannot be known by others run through our minds. Attempts to express ourselves are marked by frustration, by an inability to articulate all that we feel. Yet what runs through our minds is usually too vague, its motion too swift and elusive to find even the fragile haven of words. Most of what we think, feel — what we are — is never expressed to others; so we are alone. Not solitary, of course: our lives have a huge cast, running from the periphery to the loved, indispensable few. Yet even the friend of a lifetime can surprise in both attitude and action, for no matter how well another is known, souls do not meld. We are inimitable, distinct, unique — alone.

This is the irredeemable human pose. Nothing can take away our ultimate privacy. Community will not crowd it out, nor can friendship or therapy ease it away. For a moment, marching under banners in the comforting impersonality of common cause, boundaries of self seem dissolved, but they return to each of us, lying in his or her own bed, at night.

The second given is that we solitary creatures will die. It is mutability that makes a mockery of the ego of singleness. The fact that we are alone seems to confer a special status — each individual is a world unto himself, cannot be duplicated, is invaluable. But what can be invaluable that does not last? All those unexpressed thoughts will disappear; the grave is the final arbiter and editor.

That we are alone and ephemeral is the never-ending leitmotif of living. The note is dismal, discordant, but we manage to close our ears to the enervating strains that it sounds beneath the customary music of our lives. We know that we shall die; we know how incompletely and poorly we can be understood; but to think on that solves little and impedes a great deal. "Know myself?" asked Goethe, "if I knew myself I'd run away." Our healthy sense urges that we not look too deeply. If there is an abyss at your feet you maintain balance by not looking down.

But inattention is a palliative, not a cure. Like the liquor of Housman's poem, *Terence*: "'Tis pleasant till 'tis past/ The mischief is that 'twill not last." Most of the time, ignoring the darkness works, but suddenly, unpredictably, we feel alone and afraid. These emotions are startlingly real to us; fear, loneliness and panic all cut to the quick. They are so real

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because they are always there, just below the surface of being. Like passengers on an airplane who appear comfortable and happy until the plane is rocked by turbulence, and then sit bolt upright, faces lined with anxiety, we all have a certain dread under the placidity, waiting to emerge. We are healthy-minded if we keep it at a distance, but it is always there, and cannot be permanently repressed.

Revelation is the acknowledgement and partial reversal of this human condition. It is the promise of another presence, the assurance that our solitude is only earthly, not eternal. It is a statement to human beings at their deepest levels, a statement straight to the soul, that they are not, they cannot be, alone. Each conscious and half-conscious thought, each feeling, pain, joy and ill-formed unease is known, is comprehended. The stream of imaginings in our mind does not break against the shoals of singlehood, of loneliness, but flows into the same source. We are understood, though we do not understand.

"Anokhi," I am. The elemental force of this word is: there is existence besides you, around and above you. The societies surrounding Israel had crammed the universe with gods, good and bad, for even a malignant presence eases isolation. But that need was newly addressed by Ultimacy. The yearning for another would not disappear, but there now existed a means by which it could be partially allayed.

Thus, revelation cannot be "contentless." The boundary between presence and command is not so absolute. The very existence of another carries with it obligations and response. The content of a Divine presence is: you are not alone; there is an ultimate meaning to your actions, for they are of concern to One who is ultimate. Revelation is the certainty that our joy is not senseless nor our efforts empty; that our pain is not a tiny pitiful squeal to an indifferent cosmos, but has the dignity of true outrage and outcry — it is listened to.

The claim of revelation at Sinai as a unique, historical event is less important today than the distillation of revelation's significance, no matter its historical circumstance. The presence of God, however and whenever revealed, gave structure, not data. That is, it enabled humanity to view itself and its world from a different perspective, without legislating how that perspective would now be expressed. It gave us, to draw an analogy from the brain, spiritual circuits which could organize and interpret experience in new ways. Absolute morality seemed suddenly clear and convincing. Nature was no longer capricious — cruel and then kind by unpredictable turns. The universe was, instantly, a more hospitable place. Revelation gave the world a coherence, a meaning, a sense of governance that no warring-god scenario could proffer. One might say, for all the sentimentality and inaccuracy of the metaphor, that it was revelation which made the world not a brutish, callous and threatening place, but a home.

Thus, revelation corresponds, in some degree, to the Maimonidean

interpretation of sacrifices, that is, that they were ordained to shift Israel's perspective from paganism to monotheism (*Guide*, III, 32ff.). For Maimonides, the process is a gradual weaning away of the pagan outlook, for "man, according to his nature, is not capable of abandoning suddenly all to which he was accustomed" (Ibid.). Yet, even a gradual shift would be impossible without the conceptual breakthrough of revelation which altered the character of Israel's view of the world. Revelation laid the groundwork, in an immediate and radical way, for this change. And, despite all of the backsliding, once revelation took place, the mind-set of ancient Israel and its neighbors had, perforce, to be different. The world was differently conceived.

The subsequent intellectual and spiritual history of our people consists in the gradual unfolding of the conceptual richness and change brought about by the revelational world-view. Revelation may thus be seen as a grand-scale spiritual and cognitive *gestalt*. But it is one in which the pattern does not become clear merely because of altered perspectives, but because the very nature of perceiving has changed. Humanity is given a new way in which to see.

One need not find, in this revelational event, the disclosure of discreet commands. It is, rather, an unfolding of an entirely new *weltanschauung*. Revelation did not include an admonishment to Israel not to mix seeds. Rather, the mizvah which interdicts *kilayim* is a logical and, more important, an artistically and spiritually true response to whatever happened. At one point in history, through a descent of God and an ascent of man, accord was reached between God and Israel. One shared presence, the other gratitude and response to presence.

The mizvot are Israel's response to this gift, elaborations of the newly formed world-view that revelation offers. They were created by our people in the first fervor of disclosure, and evolved by later generations trying to recapture and reprimatinate the partnership. The mizvah is both a reflex of gratitude and a concretization of relation in the way that all relationships are formalized in symbols and actions. For without these civilities and tokens and sacrifices, however routine they can become, even the most fervent attachments dissolve. "Man cannot live on oxygen alone," said Schechter of "Prophetic Judaism" and that sage remark applies to any relation. It requires patterns, rites, association formalized in action.

Ritual is one of the bonds which makes revelation communal. Primary, however, is the underlying metaphysical reassurance of revelation. Each individual is alone, to be sure, but comprehended by the same God. This is permanent, ineffaceable. It is this which permits community in the true sense of the word — a group of individuals who are not bound together by common interest alone, but by a transcendent semi-mystical bond which cannot be expressed but is indubitably felt. There is no true community outside of a single Providence, because links of socialization, interest and expedience can all be broken at will. But one cannot

renounce being a member of the human community, bound together under Divinity. The bond can be betrayed but not erased. It is antecedent to choice.

The implications of this given structure are immense. The advance of science through the discovery of natural law presupposes a coherent cosmos. Any claim to morality that seeks to be more authoritative than human caprice must likewise have its origin in that which transcends us. The sense of belonging and of mission in human life, if it is to be more than transient and self-styled, must assume ends originating outside of human beings. In brief, we are still very much in the process of fleshing out the implications of the initial revelation.

Yet revelation contains not only this cognitive, theoretical level, but a more intimate aspect as well. All true understanding is a covenant, whether family, friend or lover; you cannot truly understand what you will not share. So each generation, each individual, has the obligation to continue the answer of Israel in the desert.

Clearly this obligation is not universally felt, and it is worthwhile for any discussion of revelation to evaluate the simple fact that revelation can be discounted or ignored. It is naive to assume that those who do not accept revelation are less sensitive or thoughtful than their religious counterparts. We may attribute the difference to free will for revelation ought not to be coercive. Life-history, outlook, and many other factors will play a role in determining one's theological posture. But the very denial of revelation can tell us something about the nature of revelation itself.

Revelation may be the determining factor in one's life, but it does not come to us today in a thunderous, compelling pronouncement from on high. It is the "still small voice" that plays insistently, but quietly. It must be sought out, continually renewed, subjected to criticism and scrutiny. Perhaps our predecessors found this new note instantly compelling but we, hardened by history or simply distracted by the clamor of modernity, must search more carefully, accept more gingerly, test and doubt more faithfully.

What revelation was, where and when it was, cannot be known. But although located somewhere in history, it is also trans-historical. For Judaism assumes that to participate in the significance of an event is also, in some deep way, to participate in the event itself. At the Seder we are told we must feel as though we left Egypt. It is in this sense that we may understand the statement that all of Israel, in each generation, stood at Sinai. Jews stand at Sinai when they incorporate the weight and wonder of that event in their lives.

Finally, revelation demands an artistic as well as a rational approach. It cannot be conceptually dissected, diagrammed, spoken about in tones of objectivity and detachment. For revelation is not directed solely to the mind — it speaks also to the soul. An attempt to give an account of revelation through reason alone is like evaluating a great

painting by analyzing pigments. Whether positive or negative, response must engage the whole person: employing reason and analysis to be sure, but they must be given wings, and that means sensitivity, sensibility, poetry.

Nevertheless, no inquiry, however artful, can approach true resolution. That is the painful and paradoxical end of any honest exploration of faith — to be forcefully reminded of the gnawing, sickly uncertainty that remains. In the Talmud it was assumed that in the Messianic age all of our questions would be answered. Perhaps the best we can hope for today is that God appreciates earnest confusion, and would rather that His creatures be troubled by honest perplexity than blinded by dogmatic certainty. For why is there a God, if not to understand?

Transcendental and Folk Aspects of Judaism

EDGAR E. SISKIN

ANTHROPOLOGISTS HAVE OBSERVED THAT A dual complex of beliefs and practices may coexist in the religion of a single culture, each with a different structure and function, each with its own symbols and rituals, concerns and outlook. One will commonly include a high God or gods, a priestly caste, solemn rituals, and scriptures invoking moral and ethical absolutes, while the other will involve a spirit world controlled by magic, functionaries skilled in manipulating it, and a motley of contingent symbols and rituals. Mandelbaum has designated these dual complexes "transcendental" and "pragmatic" respectively.¹ While, to the outsider, the two might appear irreconcilable, since they represent starkly different faith and ceremonial systems, a participant in the culture finds no difficulty in partaking of both.

Village religion in India exemplifies this duality. In both village Hinduism and Sinhalese village Bhuddism, there is a transcendental complex which comprises high gods, hereditary priests and holy texts. The emphasis is upon the universal and communal — public welfare, man's fate, ultimate purpose. At the same time, there is a pragmatic complex which is involved with local gods, lower caste shamans, and spirit possession. Focused on such exigencies as curing sickness, finding lost valuables and ensuring success in daily enterprise, its stress is upon the contingent and personal. Each complex has its own deities, functionaries, rites and purposes. Yet, despite these differences, there is no rivalry, much less conflict, between the two, and a villager will not uncommonly share in both, depending upon his momentary need.²

The field studies of anthropologists provide cognates of this transcendental/pragmatic division in the religions of widely scattered, dispa-

1. David G. Mandelbaum, "Transcendental and Pragmatic Aspects of Religion," *American Anthropologist*, 68 (1966): 1174-1191.

2. D.G. Mandelbaum, "Process and Structure in South Asian Religion," in *Religion in South Asia*, ed. E.B. Harper (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), pp. 5-20; Mandelbaum, "Transcendental," p. 1175.

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rate cultures.³ Moreover, this duality characterizes not only the religions of primitive societies but also of the world's major religions. Since Bible times, Judaism has exhibited resemblances to this pattern. If there are elements in it which stamp it as singular, the presence of this dual pattern is a schema which Judaism shares with not a few other faiths. Liebman and Sharot have noted the dual patterns of Judaism and have termed them "elite" ("official") and "folk" Judaism, corresponding to Mandelbaum's "transcendental"/"pragmatic" designation.⁴ In what follows, the respective nomenclatures will be used interchangeably.

Until recent years, the role of folk religion in the history of Judaism was denigrated or ignored and, as late as the last decades of the nineteenth century, the *Wissenschaft* school of German scholarship, in its zeal to identify Judaism as a faith compatible with the rational cast of current German thought, heaped scorn on the folk expressions of Judaism.⁵ Mysticism, Messianism and Hasidism were regarded with aversion and disdain. "Mysticism and madness are contagious," fulminated Graetz, leading historian of the time, and he proceeded to describe the *Zohar*, classic source of Jewish mysticism, as "secret lore [with] free play to pervert everything and anything . . . and . . . to promulgate false doctrine, not only absurd, sometimes even blasphemous and immoral."⁶ "Jewish mysticism," writes Maccoby, "[was] regarded in German-Jewish academic circles with contempt, as so much unintelligible and primitive gibberish, unworthy of scholarly investigation."⁷

It remained for Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and, especially, the great historian of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem, men writing out of the mythological rather than the philosophical imagination, to unveil the important role of folk religion in the shaping of Judaism. What Graetz and his contemporaries had swept aside as the husks of superstition were now shown to have been a persistent influence and a continuing subculture in Judaism since earliest times.

The Bible reveals early Judaism as both an elite religion and one

3. Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); John J. Honigman, *Culture and Personality* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954); Mischa Titiev, "A Fresh Approach to the Problem of Magic and Religion," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 16 (1960): 292-298; Michael Ames, "Magical Animism and Buddhism: A Structural Analysis in the Sinhalese Religious System," in *Religion in South Asia*, ed. E.B. Harper (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); Melford E. Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), pp. 85-126.

4. Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew: Politics, Religion and Family in American Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973); Stephen Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

5. Sharot, *Messianism*, p. 3.

6. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1894), vol. 5, p. 375; vol. 4, p. 15.

7. Hyam Maccoby, "The Greatness of Gershom Scholem," *Commentary*, 76:3 (1983): 37.

rooted in popular belief and practice. The latter aspect often ran counter to the former. The Pentateuch and the prophetic books present Judaism as moral law affirmed in a matrix of monotheistic worship, hereditary priests and elaborate Temple cultus. But there was another religious complex which exerted its hold on the people. This was the way subsumed under the term idolatry, and included the practice of magic, divination, necromancy and idol cults. The prophets loosed their thunderbolts against the idolators, condemning them as the "abomination of the nations" who merited direst punishment. Yet the ceaseless warnings against idolatry testify to its tenacious grip on the people.⁸

Idolatrous practices are traditionally held to have been borrowings from Israel's pagan neighbors. Many undoubtedly were, and Ugaritic, Egyptian, Babylonian and Persian elements have been identified in the culture of ancient Israel. The Bible never tires of declaring that the transcendental religion of Yahweh will triumph over the corrupt realm of idols, and records that the cause of the people's greatest calamities — the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the exile of the Ten Tribes in 772 B.C.E. and the burning of the Temple and the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C.E. — was idolatry. The official religion and its champions were unable to prevail against the idolatrous minions of the pragmatic religion.

The Bible condemns the magicians, soothsayers, necromancers and diviners of Israel's idolatrous neighbors, yet its pages recount the magical stratagems of Israel's own storied leaders. Moses' staff becomes a snake, he starts plagues, divides the Red Sea and splits the rock. When he raises his arms, the Amalekites are vanquished in battle. Jericho falls after seven priests, blowing seven horns, make seven circuits around its walls. Joshua pronounces a spell and the sun stands still. "You shall not suffer a witch to live," commands the Bible (Exodus 22:18), yet Saul seeks out the witch of Endor to rouse Samuel from his grave. After Joash fires three arrows into the ground he is vouchsafed three victories over the Aramaeans. The Elijah and Elisha narratives are a chain of magical happenings. In the book of Judges the only form of worship mentioned is the fetishistic idolatry directed to Baalim and Ashtoroth. The women in Jeremiah's day make offerings to the Queen of Heaven. A broad pattern of magical, idolatrous notions pervades the Bible and, as Yehezkel Kaufmann writes, "The Bible believes in magic."⁹

The dual complexes of Biblical religion are clearly seen in an objective appraisal of the place of the Temple and its cultus in the life of the people. A reiterated Biblical theme insists that communal worship shall take place only in the Jerusalem Temple. The book of Deuteronomy is a prolonged admonition to safeguard the unique status of the Jerusalem Temple as the national cultic center. Yet, it was outside of the Temple that

8. Yehezkel Kaufman, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), pp. 133-4.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

popular worship flourished. The Temple, with its priestly protocol, writes Kaufmann, was a sanctuary of silence. No vulgar noise tainted its precincts as the priests went about their decorous ritual procedures. But, outside, "throbbed the joyous popular cult, all tumult and passion." The folk did not enter the Temple but remained outside and around it. The great festivals were commemorated in the Temple with priestly ceremonies conducted in silence, for the people were not there. They feasted and fasted outside, sometimes gathering in vineyards "to watch the festive dance of maidens."¹⁰

In the immediate post-Biblical period, Jewish life was permeated with the varied symbols of Hellenistic culture. Many of the artifacts and symbols of the Greco-Roman world that were designed to thwart evil spirits and capricious gods — eagles, lions, winged victories, wreaths, wine cups, fishes — were similarly employed by Jews. Official voices might disapprove but when folk-tested safeguards against the malevolent world were available, the majority of Jews "had little concern for conformity to a system." Judah Maccabee, who, according to tradition, led the Jews to revolt against the Greeks because of the pagan threat to the pure monotheism of Yahweh worship, found concealed under the cloaks of his fallen soldiers "things consecrated to the idols of the Jamnites which is forbidden the Jews by law" (2 Maccabees).¹¹

In Biblical times it often happened that Israel "forsook the Lord and served Baal." In the Greco-Roman world the people served the Baalim of another culture. Most of the rabbinic authorities decried the ways of the pagans but some did not, so that between the divided counsel of the rabbis and the allurements of the pagan world, the people found room for ambivalent religious maneuver within the boundaries of Judaism.

Since the first pre-Christian century, mysticism has been a significant component of Judaism. Originally, it was the preoccupation of intensely devout rabbis who sought communion with God through contemplation, speculation and illumination. Their number was small and their influence limited to a spiritual and scholarly elite, but in a later stage of Jewish history, as the culture of mysticism took root and spread, whole communities, bestirred by charismatic mystics, were caught up in Messianic movements which revolutionized the Jewish world. From 1500 to 1800 the Kabbalah was widely deemed "the true Jewish theology." Scholem has shown that, in modern times, movements like Hasidism, Haskalah, Zionism and Reform Judaism were influenced in their origin and outlook by mysticism.¹²

From the beginning, aspects of folk religion entered into symbiosis with mysticism, providing a pragmatic counterpoint to the transcenden-

10. Ibid., pp. 305-8.

11. Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), vol. 12, passim.

12. Gershom Scholem, "Kabbalah," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol 10, p. 638.

tal faith. The element of folk religion most commonly associated with mysticism is magic. "Theosophy has always evinced a strong affinity for magic," observed George Foot Moore. In Judaism, folk mysticism was often linked with the magic arts and there was a "perennial interplay" between mystical beliefs and magical practices.¹³ An important realm of Kabbalah called "practical Kabbalah" was largely devoted to "white" magic. In seeking the path to God, in striving to fathom the mysteries of existence and in trying to exercise a measure of control over God's creation, Jewish mystics used the stratagems of magic like so many keys to open locked doors.

In the earliest form of Jewish esotericism, *merkabah* mysticism, magical rites were practiced in order to attain to the presence of God's chariot-throne (*merkabah*) and of the angelic palaces which led to it. The mystic seeker fasted, placed his head between his knees, whispered hymns, uttered key words and made conjuring gestures, all intended to induce the ecstasy required for embarking on the journey through the seven heavens.¹⁴ These procedures have been identified as practices diffused from ancient Near Eastern sources which rely heavily on name magic.¹⁵ And we find, in the texts of the *merkabah* mystics, lists of secret names designed as protection against demons. The names of God, too, were subject to magical application. An ecstatic would clothe himself with a garment into whose texture God's name had been symbolically woven. Martyrs who, in their last hours, meditated on "the Great Name of God" felt neither the torture nor the burning flames. "Merkabah mysticism . . . degenerates in some instances into magic pure and simple," comments Scholem.¹⁶

The high Middle Ages (500-1200 A.D.) witnessed a proliferation in Jewish life of magical agents and practices, many of them absorbed from surrounding cultures — Hellenistic, Mandaic, Persian. Magical papyri, gemmas, doorpost inscriptions, talismans, amulets, adjurations and incantations were part of the arsenal of devices employed for summoning help in repulsing the hostile supernatural forces which impinged upon the human world. Evil spirits caused earthly ills and only divine counter-measures could appease or silence them. To this end, wielders of magic invoked the names of God, of angels and demons, selected judiciously to bend the celestial world to their will. Both learned rabbis and unlettered laymen used magic in their eagerness to plumb the mysteries and to exert control.¹⁷

Early Jewish mystical movements were confined to the Mediterra-

13. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) vol. 8, pp. 46, 4.

14. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), p. 44.

15. J.A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia, 1913), passim.

16. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 78.

17. Baron, *Op. cit.*, vol. 8, passim.

nean world, but as Jews spread from their Palestinian and Babylonian centers to countries north and west, the complex of mysticism accompanied them. In Germany, especially, Jewish mysticism flourished. A movement arose called Hasidism (not to be confused with eighteenth century East European Hasidism), which blended mysticism, asceticism and an emphasis upon moral rather than juridical law. Initially, its forms reflected the religious culture of the eastern Mediterranean, from which it had spread, and its doctrines bore the stamp of the mystic-magical literature circulating widely in the Greco-Byzantine world, but at the height of its popularity, in the fourteenth century, Hasidism clearly disclosed the strong influence of native German mysticism and pietism.

In the Germany of that day belief in the reality of the occult was universal. The texture of daily life was interwoven with spectral beings — spirits benign and malevolent, demons and witches, ghosts returned to earth. Jews learned from their German neighbors the means for protecting themselves against these frightening supernaturals and adapted them to their own use. They built elaborate demonological and angelological structures in order to manipulate and frustrate the dark forces lying in wait and individuals arose who were skilled in the deployment of this magic.

Legends spread about the celebrated leader of Hasidism, Judah the Pious, author of the widely popular *Sefer Hasidim*, whose followers claimed that, among other miracles, he had fashioned a homunculus. This is the first reference to a Golem, the magical figure destined to become a favorite character in Jewish folklore.¹⁸ German Hasidism is but another movement in the history of Jewish mysticism which dramatically demonstrates the nexus between mysticism and folk religion in Judaism.

This linkage is again evident in the new Hasidism, which arose in the eighteenth century and became one of the notable religious movements of modern times. Originating in Podolia with the teachings of Israel Baal Shem Tov, it quickly won followers as it swept through eastern Europe, kindling the fires of revivalist enthusiasm in the thickly settled areas of the Pale of Settlement. Scholem describes this new Hasidism as “practical mysticism at its highest.” It differed from previous mystical movements in its proselytizing zeal, for, instead of confining mystical knowledge to a restricted elite, the Hasidim deliberately turned to the people, seeking to make Kabbalism available to all Jews and to win them to the new movement. A furious conflict erupted between the Hasidim and the established rabbinic authorities led by the redoubtable Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (1720-1797), acclaimed the greatest sage of his day. The Hasidim, enjoying the ardent, often fanatical, support of their votaries, were not

18. G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 158-204.

daunted and their numbers continued to increase as charismatic leaders (*tzadikim*) founded Hasidic dynasties throughout the Pale and beyond.

A change then took place in the attitude toward study and scholarship. Hitherto, the primacy of learning as the indispensable criterion for religious election had been an unchallenged assumption of the Jewish community. The Talmudic maxim, "Study of Torah is more important than all else," summed up the conventional wisdom, and the scholar who occupied himself unsparingly in mastering the Law was felt to possess the best credentials for rising to leadership. Now, learning began to lose its place of highest priority in the Hasid's value scheme. After all, incessant and prolonged study was a luxury that the poor could hardly afford, and the Hasidic constituency was made up, for the most part, of poor Jews. Now the qualities of charisma, intensity of faith, and illumination became most highly prized as criteria for leadership. The founder of Hasidism himself, Israel Baal Shem, was an unlettered man, as was his famous disciple and co-founder of the movement, Rabbi Baer of Mezeritz. The foremost Hasidic leaders were popular preachers who embodied the holy spirit, pneumatics who roused and inspired the people. Hasidism was, in many ways, a movement of the common man.

In Hasidism we see a replication of the close tie between mysticism and magic which marks all mystical movements in Judaism. And, here again, magic suggests itself as the untutored person's path to the supernatural. Israel Baal Shem has been called a magician. His sobriquet, *baal shem tov*, "Master of the Good Name," declared him to be a master of practical Kabbalism, of the power of wonder-working through ineffable names, amulets and the assorted devices of the magician's store. "At the end of the long history of Jewish mysticism," notes Scholem, "these two tendencies (mysticism and magic) are as closely interwoven as they were in the beginning."¹⁹

It has already been observed that the attitude of rabbinic authority toward folk beliefs and practices which violated sacrosanct norms was ambivalent. At different times and places they disclosed a variety of responses. Some denounced the beliefs and usages of the popular religion, others did not approve but refused to condemn, while still others showed a surprising toleration. And there were those who, while recognized as mentors of the transcendental faith, themselves participated in the rites and practices of the folk. Over the centuries, rabbinic authority seems to have been troubled and frustrated by the dilemma posed by the transcendental rejection of pragmatic religion on the one hand, and its ready, sometimes enthusiastic popular acceptance on the other.

The Talmud approached mystical speculation and its attendant practices with a mixture of wavering disapproval and uneasy apprehension. There is the well-known Talmudic warning, "He who meditates

19. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 350.

about four matters, what is above and what is below, what was before and what will be after, such would be better off unborn" (M. *Hagigah* II, 1). Yet, some of the renowned rabbis of the age disregarded the admonition. An oft-quoted cautionary tale which occurs several times in rabbinic literature relates how four of the greatest rabbis of the Talmud engaged in esoteric practice. As a result, Ben Azzai died, Ben Zoma went mad, and Aḥer (Elisha ben Abuya) became an apostate. Only Akiba emerged unscathed, that is, able to assimilate mystical doctrine. Obviously, warnings against mystical speculation did not inhibit some of the most prestigious guardians of the tradition from engaging in it.

Religious leaders were aware that Jews shared with their neighbors the pervasive folk belief in the occult and the compulsion to control its awesome threats. With the breakup of the Palestinian and Babylonian centers of learning at the middle and end of the first millennium, and with the dispersion of Jews to a far-flung Diaspora, it was not easy to impose uniform patterns of doctrine and practice. As a result, the rabbis were compelled to make compromises with local custom, leading to a loosening of the reins of religious authority. Baron points out that in the critical years before and after the rise of Islam there was an "untrammeled upsurge of ancient folkloristic beliefs and practices."²⁰ The rabbis knew of the people's attraction for magic — it was an old story going back to Biblical times — and they could see the broad popular following enjoyed by the mystics. They adopted an attitude of pragmatic tolerance toward the infiltration of folk elements into traditional ritual and doctrine.

Saadia Gaon (882-942), head of the Sura academy and the leading Jewish philosopher of his time, dismissed magical practices as of little use at best and as sinister at worst, but in an eventful, controversial career he never publicly condemned them or their users. Hai Gaon (939-1038), last spiritual leader of the rabbinical center in Pumbedita, while acknowledging a supernatural world peopled with angels and demons and allowing for the prophylactic use of amulets and conjurations, advised that those who would read the mystical books should "approach them . . . with fear and trepidation" and added the warning, "we have also heard insistent rumors that many persons who had become involved in them were speedily lost."²¹ Moderation toward the mysticism-magic complex was a common stance of rabbinical leaders. It may have been actuated by a nervous equivocation toward a phenomenon which, while contravening the traditional sanctities, was altogether congenial to the folk sensibility.

The ambivalence is clearly seen in a passage from *Sefer Ḥasidim*, warning that

20. Baron, *Op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 53.

21. *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 27.

he who practices invocation of angels, or of demons or [other] magic imprecations, will not have a good end; all his life he will see misfortunes befall him and his children. For this reason a man should stay away from all these practices.²²

Yet Judah himself was reputed to be a master of magic and possessor of miraculous powers. The *halakhah* calls astrology prohibited magic, yet distinguished sages like Saadia, Ibn Gabirol (1021-1056), Rashi (1040-1105), Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) and Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508) declared their belief in it.²³ Some of the greatest rabbis of their time, celebrated for their authority as halakhists, were, at the same time, adepts of Kabbalah, object of the Law's solemn warnings. Nahmanides in Spain (1194-1270) and Joseph Caro in Palestine (1488-1575) were at once great legists and mystics. Jonathan Eybeschuetz (1690-1764), peerless Talmudist of his time, who issued a ban of excommunication against the heretical Sabbatarians, was later believed to be a Sabbatarian himself and, in 1751, he was denounced by colleagues for trafficking in amulets.²⁴

Few were the leaders who, showing neither moderation nor ambivalence, took a strong position against "practical" expressions of mysticism. Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), generally regarded as the greatest medieval Jewish philosopher, was one who did not hesitate to voice his opposition, particularly to Messianism in its apocalyptic forms. A rationalist disciplined in the system of Aristotelian thought, Maimonides was outspokenly critical of the "beliefs of the rabble," recognizing them as a danger to traditional Judaism. He acknowledged that the Messiah would come, but he would come without the Utopian myths of folk Messianic doctrine — no cataclysm, no apocalypse, no miracles, ushering in a rational, "aristocratic" Utopia, whose Messiah would safeguard the Torah.²⁵ In his confrontation with popular Messianism, Maimonides dramatizes the dichotomy between official and folk Judaism. But he was exceptional in his forthright disapproval of many of the religious rites and notions found among the common people.²⁶

With all of the tolerance generally shown towards folk belief and practice, there were absolute, indispensable requirements of law and ritual which were held inviolable. No retreat from monotheism was permitted. Every Jew had to remain within the four ells of the *halakhah*. Speculation was not altogether objectionable, there was no harm in "games of magic," and occult practices which did not depart from the law but merely "went outside and beyond it" were tolerable,²⁷ but there could be no deviation from legal norms and communal controls. While mystical move-

22. Ibid., p. 46.

23. Philip Birnbaum, *A Book of Jewish Concepts* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1964), p. 57.

24. G. Scholem, "Jonathan Eybeschuetz," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 6, pp. 1074-5.

25. G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 14; Baron, *Op. cit.*, vol. 8, pp. 27-9.

26. Sharot, *Messianism*, pp. 27-8.

27. Baron, *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

ments like Gnostic Christianity may have been antinomian, Jewish mystics gladly submitted to the strictest application of the law. A strong ascetic impulse informed much of Christian mysticism; some Jewish mystics adopted a modified asceticism and the thirteenth century Hasidim insisted on a mode of observance far more rigorous than that legally ordained, but none neglected to fulfill the precept of procreation.

Nevertheless, the frontier of forbidden practice was sometimes crossed. The tolerance for "white" magic has already been mentioned, but "black" magic, which involved sorcery, necromancy and demonology and, thus, constituted rebellion against God, was condemned out of hand. Nonetheless, prescriptions for black magic are scattered through the literature of practical Kabbalah, and Scholem leaves little doubt that it was engaged in. Medieval Christians looked upon the Jew as the "magician *par excellence*," and the accusation that Jews were practicing sorcery was commonly made. In the medieval community, infested with neurotic projections and fearsome images, this charge was often the spark which ignited mob violence against the Jews. Yet, ironically, the Jew as sorcerer may have been a stereotype nourished by Kabbalist sources which blurred the distinction between permitted and proscribed magic.²⁸

* * *

We have scanned some of the evidence attesting the presence of vigorous folk components in Judaism. The question persists as to why this aspect of Judaism has been so little acknowledged.

Judaism is usually regarded as a pure monotheism enshrined in beliefs expressing moral, rational truth and in rituals dramatizing spiritual absolutes. Esotericism, magic and their brood do not belong there. Scholem suggests that one reason for the reluctance to recognize the pragmatic factor in Judaism is what he calls the "internal censorship of the past."²⁹ There has long been a tradition in Jewish life which looked upon Judaism as an unsullied stream flowing continuously from Sinai, free of alien influences, its course unchanged by distracting historical forces. Judaism was held to be informed by an authentic "essence" and whatever forms or institutions did not exemplify that essence were repudiated as impure and suspect. Mysticism interpenetrated with magic, Messianism drenched with fantasies of catastrophe, war, sexual license and apostasy, ecstatic Hasidism were, thus, rejected. This internal censorship succeeded in minimizing or obscuring the significance of many legitimate Jewish historical and religious developments. Twentieth century Jewish devotees of the Enlightenment, cherishing reason and scientific objectivity, are the natural heirs of past Jewish authorities skittishly demonstrating their preference for an elite Judaism.

28. Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Behrman, 1939), passim.

29. G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 11.

Another reason for the reluctance by Jews to recognize the influence of folk Judaism is the defensive posture of a people under threat. Jews have been under unceasing attack since earliest times; sufferance has been their badge. Medieval Christians accused Jews of being in league with Satan, performing witchcraft, practicing black magic, and perpetrating child murder, one of its supposed sequels. Some of the darkest pages in European history were written in the massacres which often accompanied these charges. Since Jews were under the necessity of defending themselves against their maligners, their leaders pointed out that Judaism did not countenance the practices of which they were being accused. In a milieu of chronic danger, prudence decreed that the Jew put his best foot forward, emphasizing the transcendental content of his religion. The literature of Jewish apologetics underlines the primacy of ethical and moral norms in the corpus of Judaism. Naturally, it has no room for its folk aspects.

A contemporary example of this defensive posture is furnished by the attitude of some Jews toward the writings of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Singer, who was born in Poland, writes about the Polish Jews of pre-World War II times, an era when most east European Jews lived sequestered in poor rural villages, integrated in the culture of the *shtetl*.³⁰ An important component of this culture was a belief in spirits and in the simple forms of magic pragmatically effective in controlling them, all carried on under the aegis of a Judaism that was devoutly observed. Singer portrays a life in the *shtetl* in its protean dimensions, including the erotic and demonological. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize, some Jews protested, claiming that he presented Jews and Jewish life unfairly, stressing its gross, disreputable side. There was another side to *shtetl* life, they rejoined, an authentic side, for, in the humble *shtetl* synagogue, "the Jews purified the souls God had given them and perfected their likeness to God."³¹ Singer was berated for depicting the Jew as a superstition-bound believer in ghosts, demons and dybbuks.

This was, perhaps, a reassertion of the old straining for respectability which had long dogged the medieval ghetto Jew. Singer had painted his *shtetl* Jews warts and all. His critics wanted them portrayed with a shining face — like Moses.

An arresting example of the persistence of folk belief and practice in Judaism is seen in the widespread employment of folk medicine in Israel today. The linkage between religion and healing in Judaism is frequently depicted in the Bible. "Throughout the Bible, healing pertains to the man of God," writes Kaufmann.³² Some of the great rabbis of the Talmud had healing powers, and their feats of curing are recorded in its pages while,

30. Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is With People: The Jewish Little-Town in Eastern Europe* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), passim.

31. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's* (New York: Schuman, 1950).

32. Kaufman, *The Religion of Israel*, p. 107.

in the post-Talmudic period, many Aramaic incantation texts were used as thaumaturgic agents in thwarting the evil spirits which caused illness. Baron calls the authors of these texts "medicine men."³³ "Practical Kabbalah and folk medicine were combined together," notes Scholem. Israel Baal Shem Tov was such a healer.

Jews who have come from Arab countries and who now comprise most of the population of Israel will usually consult a healer before going to a doctor trained in Western medicine. Healers are minor religious functionaries and, although not formally ordained, are called "rabbi." Notwithstanding the transcendental theology of Judaism, they hold disease to be the mischief of demons. A sick person is possessed by a spirit, and healing is accomplished by the manipulation of sacred names, the writing of charms, and exorcism — practices which trace directly to Jewish mystical traditions.³⁴ Curing is "based upon religious premises" and many rabbi-healers find their qualifications to minister validated in Hebrew manuscripts handed down from old.³⁵

Faith healing thrives in Israel today. Brought by migrants who came largely from Morocco in the 1950s, it is today patronized not only by oldsters of the immigrant generation, but also by their children and grandchildren, and especially by their women. Even Arab faith healers are still consulted by Jews, just as they were in the countries of the Maghreb. Faith healing in Israel is a medico-religious complex bearing resemblances to similar patterns in many cultures. Perhaps the role of the healer may be likened to that of a shaman.³⁶

In the Diaspora today, Judaism is beset by the forces of secularization and alienation in an environment which often conspires to vitiate established religious norms. Among students of the Jewish world, there is a growing belief that Jewish survival in the Diaspora may be endangered by assimilation, intermarriage and a falling birthrate. Anti-Semitism in some of its less catastrophic guises continues to erode the psychic, if not physical, security of Jews. In Israel, official Judaism may be holding its ground, even perhaps gathering some strength, although it can claim the support of only a minority of its citizens.

The received image of Judaism is still that of a transcendental religious complex. Folk Judaism, with its elaboration of pragmatic magical usages, no longer engages the commitment of a mass following. The tide of religious Messianism has long since ebbed from its apocalyptic crest

33. Baron, *Op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 8.

34. Yoram Bilu, "The Moroccan Demon in Israel: The Case of 'Evil Spirit Disease,'" *Ethos* 8 (1980): 27.

35. Y. Bilu, "General Characteristics of Referrals to Traditional Healers in Israel," *The Israel Annals of Psychiatry and Related Disciplines*, 15:3 (1977): 245-252; Ofra Greenberg, "Western and Folk Medicine in an Israeli Immigrant Community." Unpublished paper.

36. Edgar E. Siskin, *Washo Shamans and Peyotists: Religious Conflict in an American Indian Tribe* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983).

and mysticism is once again the preoccupation mainly of individual scholars. The acids of modernity have wrought radical change in the nature, structure and constituency of Judaism. But rites and notions deriving from folk Judaism linger among the still observant. Orthodox (and other) Jews nail *mezuzot* (amulets to ward off evil spirits) to their doorposts, go to a body of water on *Rosh Hashanah* magically to cast away their sins, and wave a chicken over their heads on the day before Yom Kippur in a ritual of symbolic sin transference. At the conclusion of the *Yom Kippur* service in the synagogue, the *shofar* is blown to drive away evil spirits. Parents burn their children's nail parings and shorn hair, likely residence of demons, and, when speaking of their young, utter a verbal formula designed to protect them from the evil eye. Magic practices covering many of life's contingencies are carried out by the observant, all presupposing a world teeming with spirits. The pious Jew may not be conscious of it, he may have difficulty articulating it, he may not even concede it, but his life is endued with supernatural hazard, and he still employs the old magical folk formulas for coping with it.³⁷

Even a cursory survey of the history of Judaism will disclose the presence of folk elements in the religious life of the people at many stages of its development. These may have diffused from contiguous cultures, but, whatever the source, folk notions and patterns, particularly magical usages, have been a recurring counterpoint to the transcendental complex. Religious authorities did not seek to impose uniformity of observance in the widely scattered Diaspora, for they seemed caught in an ambivalence which saw their attitude fluctuate between disapproval, toleration and participation. Internal censorship, as exercised by communal leaders who were anxious to delineate Judaism in its "best," that is, transcendental light, has obscured the importance of the folk, pragmatic constituents of the religion. Though new religious movements have arisen in Judaism since the Enlightenment, yet folk impulses and rituals continue to retain their hold on the lives of many Jews.

37. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "Tashlikh: A Study in Jewish Ceremonies," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 11 (1936), pp. 211, 216, 221; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic*, p. 169.

Joseph Heller and the “Real” King David

JOHN FRIEDMAN and JUDITH RUDERMAN

JOSEPH HELLER'S LATEST NOVEL, *GOD KNOWS* — a raunchy, death-bed oration by King David of his life's central events — has received a great deal of unfavorable attention because of its mixing of Bible with Borscht Belt. The combination does not sit well with many reviewers and general readers alike, who find the novel vulgar if not blasphemous. The *Library Journal* sums up the prevailing opinion: “Apparently written on the principle that shockingly bad taste is automatically funny, *God Knows* deliberately exploits Samuel 1 and 2 in the worst possible taste.”¹ The *New Republic* goes further, arguing that *God Knows* is just the latest and most egregious example of what it calls the “shlock of recognition”: a genre produced by an American-Jewish culture that seeks to diminish a religious heritage no longer taken seriously. The review ends on a note of high frenzy and self-righteousness:

God Knows is junk. It is also a best seller. Thus historians will have employment. They will have the difficult task of explaining how it was that the arrested adolescence of a few Jewish men became the cherished currency of an entire chapter in American culture.

God, and David, and the psalms, and all the strange and sublime things that Joseph Heller has traduced and trivialized for reasons that are best discovered fifty minutes at a time a few times a week, have anyway survived worse.²

It is not the purpose of this article to assess the artistic success or failure of Heller's work; rather, we wish to gauge the author's intentions in combining the sacred with the profane, the high with the low. In our estimation, *God Knows* marks the continuous growth of Heller's interest in his Jewish heritage and, for all its slapstick and one-liner gags, is a serious reflection on the texts central to that heritage.

Heller's Quest for His Heritage

Joseph Heller's access to Judaism was limited as a child. His father, a barely Americanized immigrant from Russia, was an ardent socialist and agnostic who saw that the boy was not raised in traditional Jewish ways:

1. Earl Rovit, *Library Journal*, (September 15, 1984): 1772.

2. Leon Wieseltier, “Shlock of Recognition,” *New Republic*, (October 29, 1984): 31-33.

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the family did not keep kosher; the child did not celebrate becoming a bar mizvah. A mark of Heller's absence from the synagogue is that when, at age fifty-nine he was shown a misprint of the transliteration of the Kadish prayer in *Good as Gold* — "yiskadal v'yiskadish" — he failed to see anything wrong with it.³ Until the publication of *Good as Gold*, Heller's novels were devoid of overt Jewish characters or concerns: Yossarian, in *Catch-22*, is Jewish in the first draft but becomes non-Jewish in the final version; Bob Slocum, in *Something Happened*, is Protestant. By the time of *Good as Gold*, however, Heller was ready to restore the kosher label, in a manner of speaking, to a career from which he had so carefully expunged it. Although half of that novel is concerned with the antics of our Washington bureaucracies, the other half deals with what it means to be a Jew in the twentieth century. The novel was Heller's one "Jewish" novel up to that time, not only because its characters are called Murshie Weinrock and Bruce Gold or because they eat pickled herring and bagels and lox, but also because one of its central questions is how the Jews have managed to survive throughout the centuries in the face of persecution and assimilation.⁴

Now, in *God Knows*, Heller has drawn deeper from Jewish tradition, examining — and, it is fair to say, reveling in — the Bible. His intent is to get beneath the King James obfuscations and the Rabbinic encrustations in order to reveal the living, breathing, human figures underneath. Indeed, David anachronistically lambasts King James on two occasions, complaining that the king's scholars relied too much on Greek sources and too little on the Hebrew: "Go figure what they're saying half the time."⁵ In reference to the common, reverential treatment of biblical figures, Heller assuredly agrees with Cynthia Ozick's central point in her brilliant short story entitled "Envy; or, Yiddish in America," in which the main character tells a translator to

please remember that when a goy from Columbus, Ohio, says "Elijah the Prophet" he's not talking about *Eliohu hanovi*. Eliohu is one of us, a *folk-mensch*, running around in second-hand clothes. Theirs is God knows what. The same biblical figure, with exactly the same history, once he puts on a name from King James, COMES OUT A DIFFERENT PERSON.⁶

Heller's literary technique in creating a David more like a *folk-mensch* than a hero is not original. Isaac Rosenfeld had already given us a *heimish* King Solomon, smoking cigars, talking on the telephone, collecting stamps, sporting bunions, corns, and hairy armpits.⁷ But Heller's is the

3. Incident from author's experience, March 1, 1981.

4. See Judith Ruderman, "Upside-Down in *Good as Gold*: Moishe Kapoyer as Muse," *Modern Jewish Studies Annual*, V (Fall 1984): 55-63.

5. Joseph Heller, *God Knows* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), pp. 96, 318. Subsequent quotations are included parenthetically in the text and refer to this edition.

6. Cynthia Ozick, "Envy; or, Yiddish in America," collected in *Jewish-American Stories*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: New American Library, 1977), p. 163.

7. Isaac Rosenfeld, "King Solomon," collected in *Jewish-American Stories*, pp. 67-81.

most sustained meditation on the Bible in contemporary Jewish-American fiction. His jumble of the sacred and profane, the ancient and the modern, knocks down the barriers between us and our biblical forbears and allows us easier access to them. By showing the similarity of human concerns, aspirations, and foibles over time and across space, Heller actually creates Midrashim of a high/low order — the simultaneity of high and low being essential for the novel's thematic points as well as its comic effect.

A Rabbinic View of Biblical Heroes

In a certain sense, Heller is trying to help us rediscover the Bible by removing the layers of whitewash that have been applied over the centuries by religious commentators and theologians. Just as Christianity approaches the Old Testament with a bias, always alert for a Messianic prediction or a validating verse about the identity of the Messiah, so, too, Rabbinic Judaism reads its canon with a certain theology in mind. Thus, our biblical heroes look quite a bit different to us through eyeglasses clouded by centuries of interpretation. The Talmud, the Midrash, and other sources of Rabbinic Bible interpretation are rich sources for discovering the classical Jewish views of the patriarchs and heroes of the Bible. If we like looking at David through the eyes of King James, we will love him from the view of some of the talmudic rabbis.

To the Rabbis of the Talmud, the Torah was the perfect, immutable word of God. Every letter, every word, every space between words held strata of knowledge waiting to be revealed or interpreted. The superficial meanings of the words were merely that: the starting places for religious-literary excavation. A little digging, and an idea or story could even be found to mean the opposite of what one had thought at first glance. The character who looked to be the victim might, after Rabbinic re-reading, be judged a villain.

The character of Esau provides a perfect example. In the simple reading of Genesis, Jacob's brother is a plain, boorish hunter who is victimized by his brother's (and mother's) ambitions and cleverness. But the Rabbinical literature turned Esau into the paradigm of evil,⁸ one who blasphemes,⁹ murders and teaches his children to live by murder.¹⁰ Indeed, when the Rabbis wanted to write about the barbarity of the Roman Empire, they substituted the code name "Esau." By turning Esau into an evil character, they made Jacob's crime of stealing Esau's blessing less troubling. How much easier to excuse Jacob of fraudulent conduct

8. The reversal of Esau's reputation seems to begin in Obadiah and Malachi. The Rabbis, however, chose to denigrate him far beyond the prophets' intentions.

9. *Tanhuma*, ed. S. Buber, *Toldot*, 67 b.

10. *Mehilta*, ed. Horowitz, *Yitro*, Section 5, p. 221.

when his victim was himself an unscrupulous thief! Thus, Father Jacob's heroic stature was secured.

It could work the other way, of course: A seemingly evil character, after Talmudic rehabilitation, might be exonerated, redeemed, or even congratulated. It should not surprise us that some of the Talmudic Rabbis had a strong tendency to judge biblical heroes favorably. After all, these heroes were their great-great-great . . . grandparents! So, if a biblical tale made Abraham, Jacob, or David appear to err, the Rabbis sometimes presumed that they had only to dig more deeply in order to find a true and blameless motive for their actions.

Joseph Heller's main character, King David, is such a hero. Were the Rabbis to have accepted the simple meaning of the David-Bathsheba-Uriah affair, they would have been faced with some impossible theological problems. Not only was David the greatest King of Israel and the forger of its nationhood; not only did he conceive the building of God's Temple in Jerusalem; not only was he the author of the Psalms; not only was he chosen to be King by none other than the Holy One himself; but David was selected by Jewish tradition to be the ancestor of the Messiah. Could the ancestor of the Messiah so lust for a sensuous woman that he could commit adultery with her and finally set her husband up for annihilation? Answering these questions with a resounding "No!", the Talmud (Tractate *Shabbat*:56a) coats David's revolting behavior as portrayed in II Samuel with a thorough whitewash:

Rabbi Samuel, son of Nahmani, said in the name of Rabbi Jonathan: Anyone who claims that David sinned is quite mistaken, as it is said [in I Samuel, 18:14], "And David was successful in all his undertakings for the Lord was with him."

Is it possible that he sinned even though the divine presence was "with him"? Then what could I make of [the Prophet Nathan's accusation to David about the Bathsheba Affair], "Why then have you flouted the command of the Lord and done what displeases Him?" (II Samuel 12:9). Concludes Rabbi Samuel, "He *desired* to do evil, but did not."

In other words, according to Rabbi Samuel, the whole Bathsheba-Uriah incident never really happened. What the Bible is describing is, in his view, merely David's lustful imagination whirling about unchecked.

Another of Rabbi Samuel's interesting rehabilitations of David's character lies in his speculation that every soldier who went to war for the House of David wrote a divorce for his wife. This theory has some basis in Jewish law. A woman whose husband was killed in a far-away battle would not have been permitted to remarry if she could not produce witnesses to, or proof of, her husband's death. The Rabbis would have considered such a woman an *agunah*, an "anchored" wife, unable to remarry. By providing a divorce before going to battle, Jewish soldiers could protect their wives from this eventuality. Although there is no evidence for this practice in the time of King David, such anachronisms did not seem to bother

the Rabbis.¹¹ Their motives for inserting this otherwise plausible theory into the text are clear: If Uriah had been technically divorced from Bathsheba when David seduced her, then David committed no adultery. To the contrary, as a divorced woman, Bathsheba was an eligible royal wife.

Finally, Rabbi Samuel tries to justify the very slaying of Uriah. It is recorded in the bible that when Uriah returned from battle, David chided him:

“You just came home from a journey, why didn’t you go down to your house?” Uriah responded, “The Ark and Israel and Judah are located at Succoth and my master Joab and Your Majesty’s men are camped in the open; how can I go home and eat and drink and sleep with my wife? As you live, by your very life, I will not do this” (II Samuel 11:10-11).

Instead of interpreting Uriah’s refusal to enjoy the comforts of home in the midst of war as loyalty to King and colleague, the Talmud chooses to interpret his words as defiance of, and disobedience to, King David. When the King says “relax,” his subjects had better relax! Thus, concludes Rabbi Samuel, David was justly punishing Uriah for his disrespect when he arranged his death. In this talmudic version of the story, David emerges from the Bathsheba incident with his Messianic crown untarnished.

It is the nature of rabbinic literature to suggest as many options for reading the biblical text as there are Rabbis to imagine them. It was quite common for the classical rabbi to “explain away” a sin committed by a revered patriarch or sage.¹² Rabbi Samuel and others like him preferred their heroes heroic.

Heller’s Challenge to the Rabbis

It is this revisionist version of the Bible which Joseph Heller contests in *God Knows*. His own working assumptions are that the real David is unknowable, but the biblical text, to the extent that it represents David, shows a very human figure indeed. Heller sees no need to justify David’s ways to contemporary readers. David is no saint, God knows, but it is this all-too-human David whom Heller loves, just as David himself loves Bathsheba rather than Abishag:

“Here and there was a mark — a mole, a scratch, a pimple — unlike any perfect Abishag, who is utterly without spot. That did not matter. I idolized the fact of her” (p. 277). “I love those extra sags of age-ripened flesh, I respond to those purple varicose defects, to the chronic edemas I identify in her feet. She has always been human, animal, and real” (p. 89).

Human, animal and real — those words describe Heller’s David. This is the lover who commits adultery with the comely Bathsheba and then

11. Heller is not bothered by anachronisms either; his jumbling of time creates comedic effects but has the more serious purpose of making David contemporary and “real” rather than hoary and untouchable.

12. Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1972), p. 132.

sends her husband to his death in battle, explaining that he could not help himself or that the devil made him do it. This is the artist who puffs himself up, taking credit for everything from the psalms and proverbs invented by Bathsheba to *The Messiah* written by Handel. This is the military leader who lacks the imagination to foresee a day when the Syrians might war with Israel or the Jews form a navy, yet who depicts his son, Solomon, as a dolt. Which unpleasant aspect of David as drawn by Heller is the *real* David? Only God knows. What Heller's Midrash tells us is that our biblical heroes were human, not gods, and we do the Bible no credit by pretending otherwise. David's great deeds and noble aspirations shine all the greater in contrast to his pettinesses, lusts, and ambitions.

Indeed, *God Knows* turns on contrasts, and succeeds where it does so only on the basis of maintaining the delicate balance between the pure and the impure, the sacred and the profane, the high and the low. Elevation and denigration — inflation and deflation — are the very fabric of the novel. Heller sets up a double rhythm, juxtaposing the Biblical passages, with their grand syllables, to the modern vernacular, often a gutter tongue. The clash of cultures, as it were, is funny in and of itself — this is how Jewish humor works, a remnant, perhaps, of the Yiddish tradition of self-deprecating humor that pulls the rug out from under itself. When, for example, Sholem Aleichem's Tevye says to God, "Thou hast chosen us from amongst all the nations," and then quickly adds, "So why did you have to pick on the Jews?", both statement and question are deeply felt analyses of the Jewish condition as simultaneously sacred *and* sorry. Tevye's first remark to God, taken from the daily prayers, is expressed in Hebrew, the holy language; the question is phrased in Yiddish, the everyday language.¹³ So, too, Heller achieves humor *and* pathos by reminding us of David's unholy impulses at the same time as we reread the inspiring translations from Scriptures.

At one point, during Heller's extended midrash, Bathsheba asks David how he likes the toenail polish that she is inventing. "Do you like this new color I mixed out of vermilion, magenta, cerise, scarlet, and maroon? I call it red" (270). In essence, the biblical passages in *God Knows* are the vermilion, magenta, cerise, scarlet, and maroon. Heller's interpretations and interpolations are the red. The holy and untouchable David whom many readers — Christians and Jews, theologians and Rabbis — have misrepresented in the ancient texts is not Heller's delight. To him the Bible is better red (read!) than dead.

13. For an excellent discussion of Jewish-American humor, see Ruth R. Wisse, *The Schlemiehl as Modern Hero* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

Tell It Not In Gath

BERNHARD FRANK

I

JONATHAN TO DAVID

D eer of Sharon lute
A nd lyre — for you the
V irgins pine and bide:
I your shadow merely
D elighting in your light.

DAVID TO JONATHAN

J ehovah had designs
O n me
N ow Saul, Michal
A nd you. I cannot
T ear myself in ribbons,
H ave but a single lute
A nd every
N ote is absolute.

II

DAVID TO JONATHAN

J aded
O reads of the evening sky
N od to us in passing,
A cknowledge our light.
T ruest of the true,
H ow sad your eyes tonight: Let not
A nglers of darkness
N eedle your delight.

JONATHAN TO DAVID

D earest of all
A nglers,
V irulent and sweet the bait
I swallow with
D elight.

III

JONATHAN TO DAVID

D one in by Eve, poor
A dam! That
V enomous snake
I n the garden, thank God,
D oes not concern us.

DAVID TO JONATHAN

J ewel
O f my eye,
N evertheless,
A nother snake
T empts us,
H eaven is
A gainst us and we are
N ot immune.

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IV

DAVID'S LAMENT

Willow by water
you the fish of
dreams run through
your hair and in your
eye folded summer
solstice of my sky.

Wasted shameful
spilling of your blood —
ichor of a gentler god —
more precious to me
than all these garbs
of royalty.

Willow by water
you the fish of
dreams run through
your hair and in your
eye folded summer
solstice of my sky.

JONATHAN'S REPLY

(Spoken by the witch
of En Dor)

Willow nothing,
Fish, my eye,
Summer solstice,
Pie-in-sky!

These garbs you wear
my cast-offs are
The ice of power
drifts you far

Willow nothing,
Fish, my eye,
Summer solstice,
Pie-in-sky!

May snort of fate
from fiery car

Scald your liver
in hot tar

Willow nothing,
Fish, my eye,
Summer solstice,
Pie-in-sky!

May the God
eclipsed my star

Steep your kingdom
back in war.

V

JONATHAN'S P.S.

(In sleep)

D reamer, forgive! From
A
V ale of tears those bitter words
I sent: Here light translates as
D arkness.

Jewish History and the Torment of Totalitarianism

STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD

The Ubiquity of Anti-Semitism

In April 1977, uniformed investigators conducted two official investigations on different continents, nine thousand miles apart, in the shadowy and isolate cellars that are the antechambers of modern tyranny. In the recesses of one of them, the interrogators applied torture in an attempt to determine how a newspaper publisher, Jacobo Timerman, was involved in a Bolshevik-Zionist conspiracy that threatened the security of Argentina. In the other cellar, interrogators were concocting the rationale for a possible death sentence to be imposed on a computer scientist, Anatoly Scharansky, who was supposed to be linked to an imperialist-Zionist conspiracy that imperilled the security of the Soviet Union.

Were the norms and language of the law germane to these two cases, both Timerman and Scharansky would have been judged innocent of any charges of espionage and treason. Neither plotted the overthrow of the regime under which he happened to live. Had Timerman and Scharansky been living in a liberal democratic state, it is extremely unlikely that either would have run afoul of the law. Instead, they were destined to be exposed to weirdly irrational and intensely paranoid fears. They became the incarnations of the demon whom the Argentinian sadists identified, as they applied the electric shocks, in their repetitive shouts at Timerman: "Jew . . . Jew . . . Jew!"¹

Less than two millennia after the most powerful of the imperial tyrannies — Rome — had crushed the revolts in Palestine, less than a thousand years after the Inquisition and the Crusades had brought death to infidels, and little more than three decades after the defeat of the Third Reich, regimes as diverse as those of the Argentine junta and the Soviet Politburo were still defining one group as a prepotent force, as an element of decomposition in the body politic. The emergence of the state of Israel, which Timerman rejected as a home but where Scharansky now lives, may only have aggravated the suspicions that Jews seem fated to arouse. The vulnerability of this people to the might of twentieth-century despots, and the responses to modern tyranny which can be located in

1. Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (New York: Knopf, 1981), pp. 60-61.

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Jewish history, are subjects that this essay is intended to clarify. I wish to emphasize that Jews were not only targets of political absolutism; some were its adversaries as well. Their testimony may also help warn others of its danger, and the retrieval of their voices from the void is both politically necessary and morally urgent.

As a tiny and irenic people in exile, the Jews ought to have eluded the obsessive attention of Christendom. But demographic insignificance has never protected Jews from the wrath of oppressors. When impoverished, they have been accused of fomenting radicalism, revolution and anarchy. When enriched, they have stirred the malevolent envy of the dispossessed. When assimilated, they have been accused of sneakily insinuating themselves into the social and political fabric. When asserting their ethnic identity, they have been subjected to charges impugning their loyalty and patriotism. When separating themselves from their neighbors, they have been called rootless. When concerned for their fellow Jews, they have been denounced as agents of a sinister international conspiracy that respects no borders and honors no national allegiances. When restricted to a few occupations, they have been condemned as parasites who live off the more conspicuous toil of others. When released from economic restrictions, they have stimulated jealousy as a by-product of resourcefulness and industriousness. When practicing their faith, they have provoked hostility stemming from myths of Christ-killing and from blood libels. When distinctive religious customs have been abandoned, an image no less chilling to Gentiles has been projected — the image of a nowhere man who is estranged, uncommitted, the incarnation of those forces of modernization, urbanization and industrialization that have defined our century.

Such a people has therefore been perceived as an historical oddity, an exception to sociological law, an evolutionary freak, a “race” or a “fossil” that, since its dispersion, has never been unified under a single government or by a single language or an enforceable code of laws or by the adhesive of armed might. Though its religious and ethical ideals continue, across the span of Western history, to lead a charmed life, the adherents of those beliefs have rarely escaped the perils of fragility. The contributions of Jews to Western civilization have not interrupted the periodic review to which their right to exist has been subject. Survival has been dependent on the approval of others. Were the history of anti-Semitism — its forced conversions, its eviction notices, its genocide — to be summarized in three sentences, Raul Hilberg’s would be the most succinct:

The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live.²

2. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979)

That decree inflicted a wound that can never heal and a grief that can never be assuaged. But the resilience of remnants of the Jewish people — their capacity to survive and even to prosper — has continued to puzzle and disturb their enemies.

Within Western civilization in the twentieth century, their most dangerous enemies have been the progenitors of totalitarianism. That word is indelibly charged with polemical force. Ever since Italian Fascists coined the term in the 1920s, it has often been used wildly, indiscriminately — and almost never dispassionately. Neither political scientists nor philosophers, historians nor journalists have agreed upon its definition, its ingredients, or the regimes (past or present) to which the term “totalitarianism” might apply. Though its value as a category in comparative political analysis began to wane in the 1960s, the political scientist who served as the American ambassador to the UN in the Reagan administration revived it to identify the primary opponents of American interests and of human rights. The validity of Jeane Kirkpatrick’s distinction between “totalitarian” and “authoritarian” regimes need not be explored here, since both sorts of despotisms — whether currently in Moscow or, until recently, in Buenos Aires — have been, or were, hostile to Jews and Jewish interests. Both left-wing and right-wing dictatorships have sought to marshal the resources of the modern state to infringe upon the liberty of the citizens whom they have subjugated. Both are forms of fanaticism that collide with minimal ideals of human dignity and decency.

According to the classic categorization of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, both sorts of government tend to consist of a single party and often of a single dictator; they rely upon all the instruments of terror that the police can inflict; they exercise a monopoly or near monopoly over communications. Like nearly all modern states, such regimes seek to hold a monopoly over weapons. Like most modern states, they also tend to organize centrally-directed economies, or economies in which state intervention and ownership are crucial.³ Under such despotisms the oases of privacy, the integrity of the individual conscience and of collective morality may disintegrate, and what Hannah Arendt called “the right to have rights” is endangered.

No definition of totalitarianism can be completely disentangled from the values of those who use the term. Thinking of the fellow travellers and their accomplices, George Orwell once remarked that the sin of the 1930s was to be against Fascism without also being against totalitarianism (that is, the Soviet Union).⁴ The indifference of the Reagan administration to

[1961]), pp. 3-4.

3. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 9-10.

4. George Orwell, *As I Please, 1943-1945*, volume III of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p. 236.

the human rights violations perpetrated by right-wing dictatorships reverses Orwell: the sin of the 1980s may consist of opposing "totalitarianism" without opposing "authoritarianism." Nevertheless, sound historical reasons warrant the limitation of this portentous term, as Arendt herself did, to two regimes: Germany under Hitler and Russia under Stalin. Their torture cellars, their labor camps, their concentration camps, their annihilation camps made these two regimes totalitarian. They resembled one another more than any other autocracy, right or left. In their unprecedented domination over the lives of citizens and in their willingness to destroy those lives, the Third Reich and Stalinist Russia differed from all other modern despotisms in Western history. Because of the lethal scale of their cruelty, these two historical entities have twisted the course of Jewish experience in ways that have exposed its extreme vulnerability and severely tested its powers of regeneration.

The technological means that Hitler and Stalin had at their disposal extended their capacity to rule beyond the fantasies of earlier despots, but the importance of such technical sophistication can be exaggerated. Genocide has never required elaborate machinery. Just as the Turks often massacred Armenians during the First World War with nothing fancier than swords, just as the killing fields of Kampuchea pervaded a relatively primitive society, so, too, some of the most fiendish instruments of Nazi and Bolshevik torture bore an ancient lineage. About a million of the Jews who perished in the Holocaust, and millions more among the *zeks* of the Gulag Archipelago, died because of a familiar scourge: starvation. From the perspective of Jewish history, what made Hitler and Stalin so dangerous, so different from earlier oppressors and tyrants, was their ideological claim to embody the will of the people and to enact the very laws of history. Plebiscites and unanimous votes for the candidates of the only legal Party confirmed the inevitable triumphs of race and class, *Volks* or Party. Nazism and Stalinism were the corrupted versions of popular sovereignty. Purporting to contain within themselves the forces of general will and national unity, these totalitarian movements posed a special threat to Jews.

For however miniscule this religious or ethnic minority was, however law-abiding they were as individual citizens, they could not be made to fit snugly into the formation of a consensus that was to be passionately mobilized in defense of Fatherland or Motherland. Even when German or Soviet Jews were not Zionists, their neighbors could often detect — and resent — differences that the Jews exhibited. What those differences have been remains elusive, maddeningly difficult to tabulate and to specify. Not even Freud, the most piercingly introspective and articulate of thinkers, could do so. In the preface to the Hebrew edition (1939) of *Totem and Taboo*, this solid burgher of Vienna laid bare

the emotional position of an author who is ignorant of holy writ, who is completely estranged from the religion of his fathers — as well as from every

other religion — and who cannot take a share in nationalist ideals, but who has yet never repudiated his people, who feels that he is in his essential nature a Jew and who has no desire to alter that nature. If the question were put . . . : “Since you have abandoned all these common characteristics of your [people], what is left to you that is Jewish?”, he would reply: “A very great deal, and probably its very essence,” although he could not now express that essence clearly in words.⁵

What Freud was unable to explain about himself — that core of personality that seemed irreducible — can only be hypothesized, and suggested as a generalization. That core is enmeshed in ancestral loyalties, but it strains toward the universal. It expresses an ethnic identity that may register only the lingering traces of religious values, but it is also susceptible to the appeal of cosmopolitanism. Because of their family cohesiveness and entrepreneurial abilities, other minority groups on other continents — such as the overseas Chinese and the Nigerian Ibos — have been compared with the Jews. But only the Jews have been discontented with particularism and with the exclusivist implications of conserving a tribal heritage. Probably no other people has longed so fully for transcendence.

Hence the grotesque irony in the complaint of a British Colonial Office bureaucrat, whose indifference to the plight of the refugees helped to seal their doom. “In their hearts they [the Jews] hate us and have always hated us,” Sir John Shuckburgh observed in 1940. “They hate all Gentiles. . . .”⁶ What psychoanalysts and others would recognize as projection is another way of underscoring how eager most modern Jews have been for the embrace of Gentiles, asking only to be included within the human family. This ambiguous Jewish hope — for the right to be equal as well as the right to be different — helped make its adherents the targets of totalitarianism, which sought to traduce both the practice of pluralism and the ideal of human equality.

The anti-Semitism that Nazism and Stalinism shared therefore deserves emphasis. It was so central to Nazism that, in the formulation of the theologian, Emil Fackenheim, “the Nazis were not antisemites because they were ‘racists’ but rather racists because they were antisemites.”⁷ One validation of this insight is to contrast the terrible fate also suffered by the Gypsies, who were mentioned neither in the National Socialist program of 1920 nor in the 1935 Nuremberg laws penalizing “racial mixing.” The repression of the Gypsies did not begin until 1938, five years after the official assaults upon the Jews of Germany. Gypsies were also killed at Auschwitz for “racial” reasons. But the gassing of the Jews had begun there two years earlier, and the awful murder of Gypsy chil-

5. James Strachey (editor), *The Standard Edition of Freud's Complete Psychological Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), XIII, p. xv.

6. Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 50, 351.

7. Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem* (New York: Schocken, 1978), p. 278.

dren was sporadic rather than systematic. Further evidence for the aptness of Fackenheim's paradoxical statement can be drawn from the earliest document of Hitler's public career, in 1919, when he proclaimed that the aim of a "rational anti-Semitism . . . must unalterably be the elimination of the Jews altogether." The last words of the Fuehrer's final recorded conversation were that "the world will be eternally grateful to National Socialism that I have extinguished the Jews in Germany and Central Europe."⁸ The argument that genocide was central to Nazism, widely denied when Hitler was actually committing mass murder, no longer needs to be belabored.

Most scholars of the last phase of Stalin's career seem to concur that a horrible — if not necessarily identical — fate almost befell Soviet Jewry. The "doctors' plot," which attributed to Jewish conspirators the machinations of assorted foreign intelligence agencies and of Zionism, updated the influential Czarist forgery that Hitler claimed to have memorized, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Such accounts as the memoir by Stalin's daughter record the dictator's crude anti-Semitism; and, in 1956, Khrushchev sent shock waves through the Twentieth Party Congress and beyond with the revelation that national groups like the Crimean Tatars, the Chechens, the Ingush and the Kalmyks were uprooted during the Second World War and partly eliminated on a "trail of tears" to the east. Within his own borders, Stalin was far more of a mass murderer than even Hitler was. The *Vozhd* partly destroyed five ethnic minorities of whom he was suspicious, and perhaps only his death — which coincided with Purim — spared the Jews of the U.S.S.R. a similar catastrophe.

Since then, even as the Soviet regime has somewhat relaxed its totalitarian grip, even as over 200,000 Jews were grudgingly permitted to emigrate to Israel and elsewhere, officially sponsored anti-Semitism has, if anything, intensified. Unlike the final stage of Stalin's rule, no one is murdered for being a Yiddish writer or for having contacts with Jewish intellectuals abroad. But the teaching of Hebrew is forbidden, Jewish religious and cultural institutions have been almost entirely extinguished, and PLO terrorists have received training under Soviet auspices. Not since the defeat of the Third Reich has a major nation been so saturated with coarse and vicious anti-Semitic propaganda. Such official notoriety has led a few non-Jewish dissidents to identify directly with the persecuted and thereby italicize their own longing for greater freedom. For example, in his poem, "Babi Yar" (1961), Yevgeny Yevtushenko called himself a Jew as a protest against Soviet anti-Semitism; and the more courageous and brilliant Andrei Sinyavsky, whose writings led to imprisonment and exile, endowed himself with a Jewish-sounding *nom de plume*, Abram Tertz. Another poet adopted his mother's surname rather than that of his

8. Eberhard Jaeckel, *Hitler's Weltanschauung: A Blueprint for Power* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), pp. 48, 65.

non-Jewish father because Alexander Ginzburg wished to install himself in the community of the oppressed.

Jews Who Cooperated With the Oppressors

Countless Jews were among the millions (estimates vary widely) who lost their lives during the purges. But the relationship of the Jews to Soviet totalitarianism is not simply that of victimization. For history rarely provides the solace of unambiguous martyrdom, much less of implacable hostility to tyranny. The Jewish tradition is easy enough to sentimentalize and romanticize, but it is also strong enough to withstand critical examination. And any analysis of Jewish experience under the impact of Stalinism must acknowledge the work of some Jews in the extension of human misery. A few illustrations can be cited here, if only as a reminder of how impossible it was, even in the Jewish world, to immunize all of its members against the temptations of totalitarianism.

It is heart-breaking to read, in volume II of *The Gulag Archipelago*, of the formation of the empire of slave labor camps, whose most important administrator was probably Naftaly Aronovich Frenkel. Born in Constantinople, Frenkel was a highly successful merchant who cast his lot with Bolshevism. It was he who bore much responsibility for devising the labor system which inflicted such ghastly punishment upon the millions of hapless *zeks*. To Frenkel was attributed the motto of the Archipelago: "We have to squeeze everything out of a prisoner in the first three months — after that we don't need him anymore." Frenkel himself reportedly "never entered a single barracks, never smelled all that stench — he asked and demanded only work." Perhaps his most gruesome monument remains the Belomor Canal, completed in 1933. Stretching from the White Sea to Leningrad, it was constructed at the cost of an estimated one hundred thousand lives. Yet when Solzhenitsyn visited the canal in 1966, it was virtually deserted, too shallow to be usable. Such slave labor, which had been completely in vain, could not even be justified as a convenience to posterity. Frenkel was hardly unique, however, in the deformation of his conscience. Many of his associates — Yakov Rappoport, Matvei Berman, Lazar Kogan, Aaron Solts — were also Jews, summoned from the very dregs of Soviet society to serve as Pharaoh's taskmasters in what gullible Western leftists considered a "workers' paradise." Honored with the rank of lieutenant general, Frenkel himself was never tried or punished for his crimes, which were not committed on foreign soil; he apparently died a natural death in the 1950s.⁹ Unlike the Nazi satraps, Frenkel and his associates are virtually unknown — either by name or by crime — in the West.

9. Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), volume II, pp. 49, 76-80, 84, 100-102, 139-141.

But there are stranger cases. The literary condemnation of Stalinism began with *Dr. Zhivago* (1958), which Edmund Wilson predicted would "come to stand as one of the great events in man's literary and moral history." A recently published collection of the correspondence of Boris Pasternak suggests that the character of Yuri Zhivago's half-brother, Evgraf, a secret policeman, was based upon the novelist's own brother, Alexander, a Chekist and an architect who, during the Great Purge, helped to design and supervise the construction of another canal built by slave labor, the Moscow-Volga Canal.¹⁰ Another instance of Jewish complicity in Stalinism can be found in the biography of Mark Zborowski, an anthropologist who was to be associated with such institutions of higher learning as Harvard and Columbia. Zborowski was perhaps most highly regarded for the volume that he co-authored with Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is With People* (1952), an informed and affectionate tribute to the shattered "culture of the shtetl." Yet neither the Sabbath prayer for scholars, who are supposed to increase the peace of the world, nor Zborowski's own knowledge of the harmless and pacific spirit of the *shtetl* impaired his work as a G.P.U. agent in the 1930s. He was assigned the task of penetrating Leon Trotsky's entourage, which he accomplished so effectively that several deaths resulted, including that of Trotsky's son, under mysterious circumstances.¹¹

Such depraved figures were certainly not representative of European Jewry in the era of totalitarianism, but neither should their deeds be consigned to oblivion. The need to remember and to mourn the Jewish victims of Nazi hatred should not prohibit consideration of the complicity of a few other Jews, when the opportunity arose, in enlarging the vast burden of suffering elsewhere. One test of ethical sensitivity is how the capacity to grieve for others who are subjected to totalitarian cruelty can be extended beyond the Holocaust. Jews, who are accustomed to appealing to the consciences of others, are not thereby exempted from examining their own; and the spiritual loss that the Jewish people feels in the wake of the Holocaust is not depleted by meditating upon the full impact of Stalinism.

The role of some Jews in inflicting immeasurable pain upon the human family cannot be explained away merely by conjecturing about motives of careerism and self-advancement. Such exculpations are considered dubious when pointing to the evil of Adolf Eichmann, for example. The Jews who served as administrators of Stalinist terror should not be dismissed as an aberration utterly disconnected from the fabric of Jew-

10. Edmund Wilson, *The Bit Between My Teeth: A Literary Chronicle of 1950-1965* (New York: Noonday, 1967), p. 446; Patricia Blake, "Blood Relatives," *Time*, 120 (August 9, 1982): 72-73.

11. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 445; Isaac Deutscher, *Trotsky: The Prophet Outcast, 1929-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1965), pp. 347-349, 390-396, 405-410.

ish life. They were, in fact, excrescences on a body politic that was itself more widely susceptible to the universalist message of Marxism, to the promise of human fraternity that would be realized by the abrogation of capitalism, imperialism and czarism. A sense of their own exclusion — their own “otherhood” — stimulated a small but noticeable minority of Jews to be seduced by the Marxist vision of brotherhood.

At its best this political tradition inspired a genuine passion for social justice, and it stigmatized narrowness and selfishness. It ignited much of the spirit that brought to fruition the Zionist settlements in Palestine, and it energized the Jewish labor movement in the Diaspora, most importantly and tragically in the Bund that was forged in the Czarist empire. This legacy stamped a set of political attitudes that the majority of Jews found entirely legitimate and natural, or, at least, genially tolerated. Take, for example, the bar mizvah speech of Norman Mailer, who expressed the wish to follow in the footsteps of “great Jews like Moses Maimonides and Karl Marx.”¹² The retrospective symmetry that was believed to constitute the tradition of humanism and progressivism was a heritage that many Jews took for granted.

Immorality of “Universalism”

A less charming feature of the Marxist project was its skewing of the valuable tension between the particular and the universal, which could lead its cadres to betray the lives and the memory of those whom ideology had reduced to faceless abstractions. Commitment to such leftism could produce indifference to the fate of those most vulnerable to totalitarianism. “Why do you come with your special Jewish sorrows?”, an exasperated Rosa Luxemburg asked a correspondent in 1917. “I cannot find a special corner in my heart for the ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world.” Two years later Luxemburg became one of the first victims of the German right-wing gangsterism that, a little over two decades thereafter, was to leave no Jews alive in her own home town of Zamocz.¹³ The world in which Luxemburg professed to feel at home offered no haven to those with special Jewish sorrows.

Lack of foresight can hardly have been the excuse of Lillian Hellman, whose memoir of a wartime visit to the liberated annihilation camp of Majdanek conceals from her readers the “racial” origin of nearly all of the dead. Peter Weiss, the Marxist playwright who has lived in Sweden and writes in his native German, drew upon the official record of the war crimes trial in Frankfurt for *The Investigation* (1966). Although its subject is Auschwitz, Weiss acknowledged,

the word “Jew” is in fact never used in the play. . . . I do not identify myself

12. Hilary Mills, *Mailer: A Biography* (New York: Empire, 1982), p. 55.

13. J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 860; Milton Himmelfarb, *The Jews of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 344.

any more with the Jews than I do with the people of Vietnam or the blacks of South Africa. I simply identify myself with the oppressed of the world. . . . *The Investigation* is a universal human problem.¹⁴

Yet Marxism has yet to explain satisfactorily why, at Auschwitz, a universal problem was concentrated upon Jewish victims.

But the influence of this ideology also corrupted some Jews into defending the interests of the Soviet tyranny, whose atrocities were dismissed as merely a few potholes on the path to utopia. Here was an important contrast with the Third Reich. Anti-Semitism made it impossible even for patriotic Germans "of the Mosaic persuasion" to lend their support to Nazism; the post-Holocaust right wing nationalism of Gershom Scholem's brother, who refused "to let Hitler dictate my [political] views to me," was truly eccentric.¹⁵ More problematic were memories of Czarist anti-Semitism, which determined the politics of many post-Revolutionary Jews and caused blindness to the perversion that Stalinism had wrought upon the humane vision of socialism. That largely explains why, at least until the 1950s, Jewish communities throughout the West continued to nurture a small minority of true believers in the Stalinist ideology. To the extent that such an outlook was regarded with indulgence, the struggle against totalitarianism was compromised, for a willingness to enlist in that struggle should have been understood as the most decisive test of devotion to human rights in general and to Jewish interests in particular. At least for a while, some Jews flunked that test.

Jews Against Totalitarianism

The historical record demonstrates, nevertheless, that the Jew was primarily the victim and the antagonist of such despotism, its target and its foe rather than its accomplice. The reason may be embedded in another facet of Jewish experience which distinguishes it from the histories of other ethnic minorities and which has rendered the Jewish people especially sensitive to the fury of totalitarianism. Unlike earlier forms of political absolutism, Nazism and Bolshevism took a keen interest in ideas, and selected their victims not only on the basis of what they did and who they were but, also, on the basis of what they thought or were suspected of thinking. One of the attributes that separated Hitler from, say, Vlad the Impaler, or Stalin from, say, Attila the Hun, was an ideological animus, a paranoid curiosity about the minds of those whom they intended to destroy. That is why the Jewish people — whose social structure since the Emancipation has been so top-heavy with intellectuals, whose role in the development of Western culture has been so disproportionate — has

14. Oliver Clausen, "Weiss/Propagandist and Weiss/Playwright," *New York Times Magazine*, October 2, 1966: p. 132.

15. Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1980), pp. 42-43.

impinged so fully on the fears of totalitarian rulers. Even amid the devastation of freedom of thought, Jews were fashioning the words and images that had to serve as the only available weapons in the resistance to tyranny. Those whom such regimes pursued with unprecedented frenzy have bequeathed the precious testimony that is needed to grasp the ends and means of totalitarianism itself.

The convergence of Nazism and Stalinism in threatening and extinguishing the intelligentsia is more symmetrical than is often appreciated. Albert Einstein is one example. Because of his birth, his politics and his scientific discoveries, the most famous scientist who ever lived fled his native Germany in 1933, while Nazi propagandists were denouncing the theory of relativity as "Jewish physics." It is rarely noted that the Soviet Union had, even earlier, officially proscribed Albert Einstein's theory because "it denied a world ether, 'the existence of which follows directly from the philosophy of dialectical materialism.'" One prominent subscriber to the theory of relativity was sentenced to an Arctic labor camp, and Lev Landau, who was later to win a Nobel Prize for physics, was imprisoned as a "Trotskyist spy." Another physicist, George Gamow, fled the Soviet Union in the same year of Einstein's eviction from Germany because, Gamow recalled,

the increasing pressure of the dialectical-materialist philosophy was too strong, and I did not want to be sent to a concentration camp in Siberia because of my views about the world ether, [or] the quantum-mechanical uncertainty principle . . . which could have happened in due course.

Despite his own socialist sympathies, Einstein himself was quick to protest the Soviet government's persecution of scientists, engineers and Hebrew teachers, and, in 1925, he wrote an introduction to a collection of documents that described the horrors of Soviet prisons and labor camps. That indictment appeared only seven years after the birth of Solzhenitsyn himself.¹⁶

Freud's pertinence to the formation of modern thought also needs no additional certification. But it might be noted that his late masterpiece, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), warned against the seething aggressiveness barely submerged beneath the surface of the social order. He, too, was exiled by the Nazis, and endured long enough in London to observe the outbreak of the Second World War that his tragic pessimism had deemed characteristic of humanity. Indeed, that book eerily anticipates the slaughter that was inaugurated with Operation Barbarossa. The

dream of a Germanic world-domination called for anti-Semitism as its complement, and it is intelligible that the attempt to establish a new, communist civilization in Russia should find its psychological support in the persecu-

16. Lewis S. Feuer, *Einstein and the Generations of Science*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1982), pp. xx, xxi, 96.

tion of the bourgeois. [Freud could only] wonder, with concern, what the Soviets will do after they have wiped out their bourgeois.¹⁷

Far less fortunate, his sisters perished in the Holocaust; his works have been condemned in the Soviet Union.

Kafka's sisters also died in the Nazi camps, and even though he himself had succumbed to tuberculosis in 1924, his tales demonstrated the power of the local anesthetic of art to anticipate a dreadful reality that others noticed too late. Kafka's grasp of the concentration camp universe was prescient: the meticulous and indifferent behavior of the impersonal murderers, the passivity of the victim who is defined as vermin and sent off to die "like a dog," the numbers burned in the flesh, the technology devised to promote the realization that human life is utterly superfluous. The memoirs of survivors like David Rousset and Heda Kovály, both of whom became implacable foes of Soviet as well as of Nazi totalitarianism, read like transcriptions into the capricious logic of terror that Kafka's hallucinatory writings foreshadowed. One exiled Soviet writer admitted that nothing shamed him more about the constrictions of official Soviet culture than its complete ban on Kafka.¹⁸ And if this essay were to have an epigraph, no statement would be more apt than Kafka's "*Man schlägt den Juden and erschlägt den Menschen*" (those who strike at the Jew kill mankind).

Other writers of Jewish origin struck back at the political barbarism of our time in ways that still instruct and illuminate. Of special resonance was the voice of Arthur Koestler, whose knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time made him an invaluable witness. No one else was so emblematic a central European Jewish intellectual, or such "a typical case history . . . in the totalitarian age," as his autobiography phrases it. A Budapest-born, Viennese-educated journalist in Weimar Germany, he opposed the rise of Nazism by submitting to Bolshevism. As Stalinism was pulverizing whatever fragile enclaves of independence remained, Koestler visited the Soviet Union, lived in exile in France, and was about to be executed by a Fascist firing squad in Spain when international pressure secured his release. Soon thereafter he repudiated Stalinism, articulating his disgust in his remarkable *Darkness at Noon* (1941), although its composition was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War and by four months in a French internment camp. Escape to England resulted in incarceration as an illegal alien.

Koestler was still behind bars upon publication of the novel whose imprisoned protagonist is a Jew by birth, a Bolshevik by training and temperament. Rubashov is both culprit and victim, both guilty and innocent. In recognizing his responsibility for the system that has destroyed so

17. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, tr. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), p. 62.

18. George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 119.

many others and will soon — in the name of the revolution — destroy him, Rubashov is like many of the Jews who were fatally attracted to Bolshevism. Though Koestler himself lived in Palestine and became an eloquent champion of Zionism, it was his record of hair-breadth escapes from violent death and his own decisive repudiation of Stalinism that made him so striking a figure. The second volume of his autobiography is illustrated with the reproduction of a poster. One of its two panels depicts Goebbels, in 1933, consigning books to the flames, one of which is marked “Köstler,” while the other panel shows German Communists in the Soviet zone of occupation in 1952 also burning books, including a volume by “Köstler.”¹⁹ In our century a political writer can scarcely receive a greater honor.

It was Marx’s friend, Heinrich Heine, who predicted that where books are burned, people would be, too. And if mass murder distances totalitarianism from all other forms of dictatorship, our understanding of this feature of Nazism and Stalinism is much indebted to Raphael Lemkin. Before the Holocaust, which killed 49 members of his family, Lemkin had been active in Polish legal affairs and, as early as 1933, he had proposed to the League of Nations that the crime of “barbarity” — the “destruction of national, religious and racial groups” — be defined in international law as a crime, just as slavery, piracy and drug smuggling have been. Having escaped to the United States, Lemkin published, in 1944, a study of the jurisprudence of Nazi-occupied Europe. That analysis introduced into our language the word “genocide,” which was “intended to signify a co-ordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves.” Lemkin’s formulation was incorporated into Count 3 (Crimes against Humanity) in the indictment of the 27 German officials at Nuremberg. He then successfully lobbied at the United Nations which, in 1948, adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Israel ratified it in 1949, as did 19 other nations (though not the United States, fearful of risking its sovereignty). Thus was established the Genocide Convention in international law.

In 1953, the indefatigable Lemkin requested that the United Nations investigate the violation of the Convention by the Soviet Union and its satellites, whose severe persecution of Jews and other minorities — he charged — constituted genocide. But Stalin’s death ended an immediate threat to the physical survival of Jews, and the United Nations was very reluctant to tackle so ominous an issue. Lemkin was, nevertheless, more responsible than anyone else for devising the legal standards to which the opponents of barbarism can appeal.²⁰

19. Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing: An Autobiography* (Boston: Beacon, 1955), pp. 428, 430-431.

20. Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals*

Finally, no consideration of Jewish history and the torment of totalitarianism can neglect Elie Wiesel, whose writings can be neither easily evaded nor readily absorbed. In no ordinary sense is he a political writer, although *The Jews of Silence* (1966) was the first reverberant indictment of the anti-Semitism that the heirs of Stalin have perpetuated. A recent novel, *The Testament* (1980), resounds with the echoes of *Darkness at Noon*, for its protagonist is a Bolshevik imprisoned in his own country, awaiting execution, brooding over his own complicity in the crimes of the revolution. In this novel, however, the protagonist will die not as a Communist but as a Jew, one of the Yiddish poets whom Stalin had doomed along with Jewish culture itself.

But it has been Wiesel's own survival, his own searing, if ultimately futile, attempt to render in words the experience of the Nazi camps, that have been crucial to the comprehension of the unspeakable. His memoir, *Night*, was, apart from the special case of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1952), the first book published in America to break the silence enveloping the subject of the Jewish catastrophe. Many passages in Wiesel's brief account are indelible, but one episode should be resurrected here. It is the author's recollection of the terrible forced march in the snow from Auschwitz to Buchenwald. In a shed packed with the bodies of the dead and the dying, Wiesel hears — miraculously — a violin being played for the last time by another young prisoner, whose whole abbreviated life is yearning to consume itself and to express itself by rubbing melody from those strings. It was magical, it was overwhelming, and when Wiesel awakens the next morning, the musician has expired, slumped over his instrument.²¹

The "violin in the void" happens to be how another novelist, presumably unaware of *Night*, once crisply described human existence itself.²² Totalitarianism showed how terrifyingly fragile that existence could be, how delicate was the civilization that has emerged from the void, how problematic the moral and aesthetic resources with which to combat depravity and desolation. Though Wiesel's image of the concerto wafting over the inert and ghostly bodies is preserved in language, that image also suggests the radical insufficiency of our vocabulary in accommodating the meaning of totalitarianism. Any rendition of its cruelty is necessarily a distortion. But the option of silence is almost certainly worse, since it makes forgetfulness more likely and increases the risk that millions of victims have died in vain.

For those who have escaped the direct ravages of totalitarianism, who

for *Redress* (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), p. xi; *New York Times*, August 30, 1959: 82; Steven Schnur, "Unofficial Man: The Rise and Fall of Raphael Lemkin," *Reform Judaism*, 11 (Fall 1982): 9-11, 45.

21. Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1960), pp. 97-98.

22. Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, edited by Alfred Appel, Jr. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. xxii.

never had to endure on earth what had previously been imagined only as the geography of Hell, no quest for meaning is more treacherous. The testimony of the survivors from Europe is indispensable to us, but, in the final analysis, it is inconclusive. After revisiting the site of Auschwitz, Wiesel admitted: "I understand it less and less."²³ Only two Jews eluded the writ of the Final Solution to serve as heads of government, and they have been as divergent as Israel's Menachem Begin and Austria's Bruno Kreisky. And the fact that so many others perished namelessly does not tell us enough about the values which they affirmed, or the lessons to be drawn from so unparalleled a disaster.

Even when no satisfaction of the demands of justice is possible and no retribution is conceivable, modern Jewish history discloses at least a couple of political responses to the torment of totalitarianism. One political answer has been a renewed appreciation of the virtues of classical liberalism, a deeper loyalty to the democratic faith itself. Despite the injustices that continue to scar free societies, our most deprived fellow citizens would probably not want to trade their own worst nightmares for the actual nights that Wiesel and others suffered, or exchange their own burdens for one day in the life of Ivan Denisovich. These are alternatives lurking in the folds of recent history. Hence the allegiance that Diaspora Jewry has given, ever since its emancipation, to the evolving standards of civil rights and civil liberties, as though confirming John Stuart Mill's case for the superiority of liberal society. Virtually no one directly familiar with tyranny and slavery has freely preferred them.

The other political response, from which it is by no means entirely separable, has been Zionism, the recognition that national sovereignty would bestow upon the Jews the protection that even democratic states have weakened or withdrawn in times of crisis. Created too late to save most of the victims of one totalitarian regime, Israel remains the elusive goal of many of the legatees of another form of totalitarianism. Instead of marking a caesura in Jewish history, Israel has not been spared the tensions and antinomies that have cleaved the Diaspora, and the political and military insecurity that has dogged the state from its origins has magnified the sense of Jewish vulnerability coursing from Moscow to Buenos Aires. This precariousness is perhaps best conveyed through the conversation of two elderly Jews during the Arab siege of Jerusalem in 1948. "We can only be saved," said one, "either by a miracle or by a natural event." These were the only two logical possibilities. "So what is the natural event?" asked the other one. To which the first Jew replied: "The coming of the Messiah, of course."

That particular natural event remains cancelled until further notice, but the rabbinic tradition is farsighted enough to instruct Jews how to

23. Otto Friedrich, *The End of the World: A History* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1982), p. 334.

behave after the Messiah has arrived. Even after the inauguration of universal peace, according to Talmud *Megillah* 1:4, two of the 613 *mizvot* must still be obeyed, two holidays should still be observed. Curiously enough, neither holiday is Rosh Hashonah or Yom Kippur, nor will Jews be required to keep the Sabbath. Instead, they are enjoined to celebrate Chanukah and Purim. Students of the Talmud can find no explanation therein, but the traits which these two holidays share may suggest their importance in a world so desperately in need of messianic redemption. Unlike all of the other festivals, Chanukah and Purim are both based upon post-Biblical historical events — and the same kind of historical event. These two happy occasions celebrate victories over tyranny; they commemorate the frustration of despotic efforts to impose false gods and to crush a beleaguered people. In this illustration of rabbinic wisdom, faith and history converge to provide solace amidst grief and to remind Jews of the enduring value of freedom.

The Agony of the Yarmulka — A Confession

JULIAN UNGAR-SARGON

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT, OF ALL the halakhic ritual that I subject myself to in pursuit of Orthodox Jewish tradition, the wearing of the *yarmulka* would turn out to be the most traumatic?

To introduce you to this unusual phobia of mine is difficult. Unless you have experienced the embarrassment of wearing the *yarmulka* in public, and by that I mean not a hat or cap or beret or any other camouflage, you have not yet crossed the threshold from acquired comfortable private observance of Judaism into a disquieting, uncomfortable public expression of a tradition that you may not necessarily want each and everyone out there in the world (*die welt*) to be privy to.

Not even a Talmudic dictum, certainly not from the Torah, this Jewish tradition of covering the head has its expression in the modern day *kippah*. You can tell a man by his dress; you can tell a Jew by his headdress. From the stylized *kippah s'rugah* or crocheted *yarmulka* of the "left wing" Mizrachists through the leather or suede of the modern Orthodox New Yorker to the velvet *yarmulka* of the Hasid, the material matters as much as the size. From the sixpenny size, representing he who would "rather not wear it" to the largest crocheted one, representing the "right wing" Merkaz Harav and Gush camp, the size reflects the intensity of commitment or, at least, of the overt affiliation to the parent social group. All shades of orthodoxy are thus reflected in the size and material; once you are trained, you can size up an individual instantly, without need for further investigation!

We are told by the Code of Jewish Law that covering the head is in deference to the presence of the Almighty and that one should not walk for more than four paces without a head covering. An act of deference, it is well known in the East, where people cover their heads out of respect, in contrast to the West where one usually bares one's head in deference to the Holy (church) or even the upper class (the squire, a "lady" or "gentleman").

Yet, for me, growing up as an observant Jew in a secular world, no single observance has caused me greater sacrifice and more grief than this one. I can easily tolerate the embarrassment and excuses of early Fridays,

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holidays, and even dietary restrictions, but the *yarmulka* again and again challenges my deepest commitment. To remove it would plunge me into a longed-for world of anonymity, which I crave, not having constantly to “stand out in a crowd.” It’s not even the people you work with that are the problem; they soon recognize you to be as mortal as they, with similar human inadequacies and failings. They rightly learn to accept you despite your “little beanie.” It’s the constant meeting with strangers, where you are sized up by your dress and categorized as friend or foe, fiend or fanatic, normal or eccentric, of similar class and background or “extremist sectarian.” To stand separately, as a Jew is supposed to, is one thing, but the relentless self-awareness soon turns into the very thing that it was designed to do, i.e., to prevent social intercourse with people of different persuasions. Yet that is precisely what my father had brought me up to reject: not to be a Jew in the ghetto, protected and shielded, but to be a “*Yisroel mensch*,” a Jew out in the secular world interacting with the enlightened. He and his father had rejected that isolation in Vienna at the turn of the century, when its gates were opened to the Jews of the *sheva kehillos* (the seven communities surrounding the city) for the first time in four hundred years. This flush of excitement and the wondrous involvement in a new world that was open to him was, I suppose, genetically transmitted to me.

Yet, I know I could have received a *hetter* (a rabbinical dispensation); in fact, I received one prior to entering medical school in London at the age of eighteen, at a time of momentary weakness. The rabbi told me, in fact, that “this much was not expected of you” and that he, himself, had refrained from wearing a skullcap in Germany whilst attending university and gymnasium. However, I hesitated and thought, “Would this not be, for me, a betrayal?” The weight of the failure of Vienna in 1942 and the death of my father’s father by the inaction of those “enlightened” Europeans in that city weighed too heavily. So, I continued to suffer the embarrassment yet again as I walked into the medical school amphitheater in front of 120 students to take my seat.

Coming to the United States changed everything initially. In New York, the *yarmulka* was commonplace, and immediately I felt unconscious of its ubiquitous presence on my head, but, then, also, I felt a general devaluation of the currency of many *mizvot*, as the social and cultural milieu of living among millions of Jews seemed to distract me in its vitality and dynamism. Maybe halakhah has less meaning if one is culturally involved in things Jewish and Yiddish. This same question was even more poignant when I visited Israel. Was Zionism and living a life in Israel a fair substitute for the ritual that kept Jews distinct in the *Golah*, and was ritual now redundant? I wanted ever so much to disassociate myself from the politics of orthodoxy there. I felt a much greater kindred to those who were constructively “building the land,” as Rav Kook put it, than with those with a *yarmulka* similar to mine who engaged in “other” activities.

On moving to Boston, however, much of the European embarrassment returned and the flushed face before a weekly audience at Harvard now gives me a nostalgia for my days at the London hospital. Once again, it has reluctantly become for me a focal point that represents all that separates me from a modern secular professional class that I yearn to be part of, but never can. Earlier, I had thought it was entirely due to my self-imposed isolation because of the *yarmulka*; however, slowly I am beginning to realize that, even without the *yarmulka*, the isolation continues and that I probably could still not be part of that world.

It must mean something. However, I'm not sure I yet understand and a deep ancestral sigh down inside me keeps telling me that it is more important than I think. As I get older and the enthusiasm and innocence of my youth wane, and as I compromise morals and principles more and more, I feel that possibly I should not be privileged to wear the *kippah*. Maybe one's personal standards need to merit this level of external observance. Indeed, it was my father who always told me that those who wish to compromise themselves in public should not wear the *yarmulka* during visits to a nightclub, etc. He also felt that the *yarmulka* itself can propel a person to maintaining standards by, in a sense, preventing that person from misconduct by its very presence. So, ever so slowly, I begin to feel that maybe it is the *yarmulka* that is "keeping me" and even paying me back for those years of agony. Slowly, ever so slowly, I'm finally making my peace with this most difficult of *mizvot*.

An addendum . . . my sons came home with new *yarmulkas* this week. Painted on them were figures of Superman and He-man — fate has, indeed, a divine sense of humor!

Raging Wisdom: A Banner of Defiance Unfurled

KARL A. PLANK

O never say that you have come to your journey's end,
When days turn black, and clouds upon our world descend.

....

No poet's playful muse has turned my pen to write,
I wrote this song amidst our anguish of our plight.
We sang it as we watched the flames destroy our world,
Our song is a banner of defiance we unfurled.

H. Glick, "Song of the Partisans"¹

THE FRENCH AUTHOR, ALBERT CAMUS, opened his 1942 essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in the following way: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."² I believe that it also poses one of the fundamental questions of biblical Wisdom literature in Israel: does created life evince a pattern of meaning within which I can pursue my well-being, or does the creation stumble in absurdity, ultimately frustrating human value? Not that the sages preoccupy themselves with whether or not to live; for the most part, they do not. But their way of addressing various concrete issues does presuppose a deep underlying conviction of the creation's order, a conviction which, once shaken, comes driving to the surface with a devastating impact. Suicide, rarely the subject of Wisdom discourse, remains tacitly at stake in the sage's assumption or denial of the possibility of meaningful life. The most direct proverbial maxim yet shimmers with the echo of Job's wife and her invitation to "bless God (a euphemism for 'curse') and die" (Job 2:9).³

Wisdom literature, in its various expressions, seeks to promote an

1. From the translation by Ben Zion Bokser, in *Witness to the Holocaust*, ed. Azriel Eisenberg (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981), pp. 474-75.

2. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, tr. J. O'Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 3.

3. I follow Andre Neher's suggestion that the literal translation of the imperative of Job's wife forcefully heightens the tension of this episode. See *The Exile of the Word. From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, tr. David Maisel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981), p. 193.

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understanding of human existence and inform the conduct of daily life. If I am to live a meaningful human life, the sages presuppose, I must discern the nature of human life as it presents itself in the world, in the ordinary, concrete traffic of daily affairs: in the relationship between sexes, in family matters, in the realm of social, political, commercial, and intergenerational activity. Through proverbs and enigmas, dialogues and narratives, the sages encourage this discernment of “how things really are,” and summon a quest for the reasoned assurance of well-being.⁴

With insight the sages remind us that human beings are oriented toward order and live in such a way as to seek its maintenance. To live a meaningful life I must have some “world,” some ordered domain, in which to live it out. For me to live with intention and responsibility — to participate in the various activities which characterize life as human — requires some context of wholeness, a universe. And more: it requires not only that some order exist, but that I can know that order.

Yet, the quest for order is not itself the good which wisdom seeks. When any particular sense of order rigidifies it may stifle life and diminish openness to the breadth of human experience. Against the idolatry of order prophets have long hurled their cry. But all such criticism notwithstanding, some sense of order remains prerequisite to meaningful life. The dissolution of order may not, in fact, bring about suicide, but it does call into question the possibility of my well-being and either forces some reinterpretation of what constitutes meaningful life or simply gives rise to despair and the erosion of life’s value. In short, apart from some creative reconstruction of a world of meaning, the fracturing of order plants suicidal seeds in the fertile ground of chaos and desperation.⁵

What are Wisdom’s basic convictions about the world and its order? Does the Wisdom tradition, with one voice, assume and affirm some knowable order that makes possible, informs, and encourages a meaningful life? In what follows I will look at three Wisdom texts — Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth — with an eye to these questions and a concern for how their responses illumine the perils and possibility of human well-being.

Our first text, the book of Proverbs, reflects the sages’ pursuit of

4. On the definition of wisdom, see James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), pp. 11-25.

5. One such reconstruction, for example, is the phenomenon of post-Exilic Judaism. The chaotic experience of Exile threatened to disrupt Israel’s guiding “story,” its myth of God’s presence in history which had nurtured its identity and provided a context for meaningful life. Post-Exilic literature responds to this crisis by retelling that story in light of the changing historical situation and, through a new “Torah-centrism,” brings to order a context of life within which the identity of faith could be realized. Catastrophe threatens to turn history into an episodic affair causing life’s meaning to dwindle in discontinuity. Where this is so, desperation may be fought through the recovery of story. Hannah Arendt’s quotation of Isak Dinesen is to the point: “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them” (*The Human Condition* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958], p. 175).

knowledge. As interpreted by a modern critic, the sages who speak through the proverbs believed that

a fundamental order lay hidden within the universe; this ruling principle applied both to nature and to humans. Discovery of this rule enabled the wise to secure their existence by acting in harmony with the universal order that sustained the cosmos. Conduct, it follows, either strengthened the existing order, or contributed to the forces of chaos that continually threatened survival itself.⁶

The guiding conviction of these sages is that, in the creation, Dame Wisdom speaks, revealing a life-giving order to the one who listens and hears:

Does not wisdom call
does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights beside the way,
 in the paths she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
 at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud:
"To you, O people, I call,
 and my cry is to human children.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
 O foolish ones, pay attention.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,
 and from my lips will come what is right;
for my mouth will utter truth. . . .

And now my children, listen to me:
 Happy are those who keep my ways.
Hear instruction and be wise,
 and do not neglect it.
Happy is the one who listens to me,
 watching daily at my gates,
 waiting beside my doors.
For the one who finds me finds life and obtains
 favor in the Lord;
But he who misses me injures himself;
All who hate me love death" (Proverbs 8:1-7; 32-36; RSV, alt.)⁶

To the one who pursues Wisdom the world is cosmos and not chaos. Such a person receives the blessing of life. Only the one who courts folly, who refuses to listen to Wisdom, becomes a lover of death — and that person must actually refuse to listen, for Wisdom calls and shouts forth her understanding seemingly everywhere: on the heights, in the paths, by the town gates. When one seeks to hear there is no place that Wisdom does not speak.⁷

The wholeness of the world of Proverbs, however, is shattered by the blows of our second text, the book of Job. Yet, total responsibility for the

6. Crenshaw, *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

7. In addition to such paeans of Dame Wisdom's speech, proverbial teaching itself assumes a certain order in creation through its dependence on analogy and focus on that which is typical in human life.

fractured cosmos does not belong to Job's dung-heap alone. Job attests an ironic development of the Wisdom tradition itself. Wisdom has sown the seeds of her own undoing and in Job we find only the fruit of its cursed harvest. From its origins, the way of Wisdom had encouraged the serious observation of the world and had aligned truth with what could be perceived in the human experience. For the sage, confidence in the Creator required seriousness about the creation and everything that occurred within it. This fundamental conviction keeps the sages' eyes turned toward creation even when it afflicts, and leaves no place to hide from the implications of the Joban catastrophe. Compelled to take created existence seriously, the sages find in Job the source of a devastating quandary, for depicted there is not the clear speech of Dame Wisdom, but God's silence; not the ordered justice of a universe, but divine capriciousness; not the blessing of the wise, but the cursing of the righteous. With Job, the sages must add innocent suffering to their list of worldly concerns. With Job, the sages' sense of cosmic order becomes impaled on the spurs of theodicy, fractured in the tension between divine justice and arbitrary misery.

The story of Job. At its very beginning the curtain is drawn on a monstrous scene: on nothing more than a whimsical dare from Satan, God horribly afflicts his servant Job. No noble purpose softens the picture; no flaw in Job eases the scandal. In utter starkness, we become witness to a capricious torture and in that deed view the unmasking of God's other face: in Job, God is the enemy . . . and worse, an enemy who maims without reason.⁸

The obsessive need of interpreters to search, as do Job's consoling friends, for some glimmer of divine justice or human wrongdoing already attests to the trauma induced by the story. Job's world is fractured. It has no order, no meaning. We are tempted to think that Job's world collapses at the onset of affliction or with the advent of divine hostility. But, in fact, affliction brings with it a strange capacity to focus experience and the presence of an enemy can also provide a source of order: for all of its notoriety, hostility is a predictable phenomenon. Neither pain nor hostility shatters Job's world as does the intrusion of divine capriciousness. Where God acts on whim, anything can happen. Where God destroys life with caprice, nothing Job does can secure his existence. His well-being is fundamentally threatened. The randomness of the divine deed obliterates any attempt on Job's part to order the world of his own action. Little wonder that Job perceives himself as a victim. Little wonder that his wife invites him, with a touch of irony, to "bless God, and die."

Job's wife troubles us, not because of her dangerous invitation, but because of her apparent clear-sightedness into what is at stake in Job's

8. On the notion of God as enemy, see James L. Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment. Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* 12 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

predicament. When divine caprice enters Job's world, it threatens the conditions of meaningful life. She sees not that Job is wrong in clinging to his integrity, but that, right or wrong, his integrity makes no difference. She sees, not that Job's intentions and actions have taken on a negative value, but that they have lost value altogether. And when that happens, what remains to enable life? When Job can no longer choose life, he can yet choose death and thereby rob the divine antagonist of the pleasure of his victimizing. In death Job would claim the power over his fate that is denied him in life.

But Job resists his wife's strategy and pursues another course of action. He protests. He rages. For no reason, God has thoroughly victimized Job and then has walked away from the pillage, deaf to the victim's wail. With his own angry cry Job fills the silent void of God's withdrawal. He indicts God for his crimes and repeatedly demands that the charges be answered. In his power, the capricious God may make Job a victim, but only Job can make himself a silent victim. Robbed of his humanity, Job's protest yet speaks a human word that claims dignity for himself and simply refuses to be ignored. In his protest, we discover that the deepest of afflictions is not the cruel ordeal but the divine silence. To God, apparently, the devastation of Job is not even a crime worth answering.

Job's protest restores to his life at least a momentary freedom that affords some meaningfulness. Protest is a genuine expression of taking something seriously enough to object to its absence or violation. Protest proclaims that something matters and that its absence is of some consequence. Job's raging cry affirms the phenomenon of Wisdom. In his protest, he becomes an ironic sage, for, no less than does the teacher of Proverbs, he clings to a vision of cosmic order and justice. The only difference is that where the proverbial sage affirmed the presence of such order, Job protests its absence. For both, though, that vision expresses a deep conviction that orders their existence and suggests its meaningfulness.

But then, following Job's repeated demands, YHWH responds to his victim, speaking from the midst of a storm, from out of a whirlwind:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
Gird up your loins like a human being: *I* will question you,
and *you* will answer me.
Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Have you commanded the morning since your days began and caused the dawn to know its place?

Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep?

Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion?

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover

you? Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, "Here we are"?

Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
(Job 38 passim, and 40:2; RSV, alt.)

In one sense, Job's protest is effective: it brings about a confrontation between himself and his victimizer. YHWH speaks. The divine silence breaks in the midst of the whirlwind. In another sense, however, the protest goes unmet, unanswered. The divine silence is actually maintained, protected by the noise of the whirlwind. YHWH's "verbal hurricane" brings about no real confrontation, only a "dialogue of the deaf" — a maelstrom of rhetoric that erupts as if YHWH had heard nothing that had been said all along.⁹ From out of the whirlwind comes no verdict on Job's integrity, no explanation of the ordeal, no expression of commitment or concern, no restoration of justice. From out of the whirlwind comes only the belching of divine power that overwhelms an exhausted Job, the Creator's challenge to "put up or shut up."

The poem's conclusion does not resolve Job's plight, but only confirms its extremity.¹⁰ Job's world remains as it was at the first sign of affliction; only now, perhaps, he shows the uneven scars of the ordeal. As the voice of the storm unequivocally reminds, Job's world is at the mercy of an alien, almighty power, the unrivalled power of the Creator. But what is unsaid speaks with even greater force: no word curbs the whimsy of divine caprice; no pledge restrains the exile of Wisdom. Before such divine silence Job's protest may be meaningful and may delay the onset of suicide. But it remains fragile and precarious.

The passage to our last text, the preaching of Qoheleth, offers no real consolation. In the message that all things are vain (1:2), empty of significance, Qoheleth challenges even the meaningfulness of Job's protest. It, too, with everything done under the sun, would show itself to be a "striving after wind." In Qoheleth's universe, all knowledge yields sorrow (1:18), be it the sage's attempt to order what is there, or Job's protest of what is not there. Knowledge yields sorrow because it is always a knowledge of limitation — an ironic knowledge that we do not know. Unlike Job's universe, the world of Qoheleth is not riddled by divine capriciousness. A created eternity exists, but it falls apart with the inability of the human self to know it. In Qoheleth's own words, "God has put eternity into the human mind, yet in such a way that no one can find out what he

9. Thus Neher, pp. 29-30.

10. The Book of Job consists of a poetic dialogue set within a framing narrative (1-2 and 42:7-17). My discussion presupposes a critical judgment that the poem and the narrative reflect different literary strata and that the affirmation of the prose conclusion conflicts with the ending of the poem. This does not deny the power of the prose sections, only its authority to interpret the poem which remains the focus of my concern. For recent analyses of this problem see the commentaries of Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978) and Marvin Pope, *Job* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973).

has done" (3:11). The resulting predicament differs but little from the Joban plight: in neither case can a human being apprehend wisdom; in neither case do we find any security of human well-being or guarantee of meaningful existence. For Qoheleth, the sage confronts only the awareness of the inevitable insecurity. Perhaps this becomes his own version of protest, though one offered with no little degree of resignation and tentativeness.

Job and Qoheleth move the wisdom tradition toward a profound awareness of doubt. In these writings the sages bequeathed to their readers a legacy of thorough-going skepticism, a legacy which encouraged in Israel an intense realism over the ambiguities of human existence. Though clearly a departure from the confident triumphalism of Yahwistic faith, the growth of Israelite skepticism is only misunderstood when taken as a movement toward unbelief. All genuine skepticism includes both a denial and an affirmation. The skeptic's criticism emerges not from an impoverished pessimism, but from a powerful vision of another ordering of reality. Doubt and faith appear on a common horizon in the skeptic's world.

The growth of Israelite skepticism, nevertheless, marks a significant theological crisis in Israel. Confidence in God as Creator had led to a seriousness about created existence that could not be repressed. Sensitive observation about what men and women actually experienced soon made it untenable either to trust the goodness of a covenantal God or to rely upon the power of human beings to know the truth. The sages, unlike their apocalyptic counterparts, were unwilling to banish God from the realm of human affairs, but neither would they keep him there with any illusion. Better to give up the pretension of historical and cosmic order than to purchase it with the religious endorsement of dishonesty. The sages' persistent conviction that created existence disclosed reality made chaos and uncertainty preferable to any illusion. This trajectory of historical realism would continue through time to mark the dominant streams of Jewish faith.

To return once more to our opening theme, does the issue of suicide pose the fundamental question for the Wisdom tradition? In light of its persistent concern for the conditions of meaningful life and keen awareness of its attendant perils, the Wisdom tradition honors a tacit ubiquity of suicide's challenge. Between proverbial maxim and haunting dialogue Wisdom struggles to affirm the order which nurtures human well-being while recognizing the vulnerability of that order to caprice, to catastrophe and confusion. Although Israel's sages do not wrestle with the decision to live or die, they confront with realism the threat to meaningful life and, in doing so, respond ever and again to the real challenge of Job's wife: is human life worth living?

Job and Qoheleth fail to answer the question, but emphasize the necessity of asking it. In these skeptical writings, Wisdom's banishment of

illusion may make it difficult to affirm created existence as it is lived out; yet, if bought with illusion, the value of created existence has already been surrendered, an act, in one sense, tantamount to suicide. Not death as much as illusion jeopardizes the human quest for well-being.

Where Wisdom assumes the vantage point of skepticism, the sage can move in one of two directions, cynicism or protest. Cynicism: the erosion of the skeptic's vision into sheer contempt for created life, the fatal first-step toward the logic of suicide. The other direction, that of protest, finds the sage embodying the posture of the angry Job. Such protest marks the transient attempt of human beings to rescue life through their frail, but blessed rage.

In the poet's words:

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

....

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.¹¹

11. Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night."

The Flexible Word of God: Thoughts on the Other Pole of Biblical Authority

BENJAMIN EDIDIN SCOLNIC

LET US BEGIN WITH A PROPOSITION: THE Bible contains the Word of God, and Biblical history is the fulfillment of that Word. Even if one disagrees with the theology which is the basis for all such statements, one would probably be prepared to accept the idea that the Bible sees itself as the Word of God and its history as the enactment of God's Will.

If God commands a ritual, that ritual must be observed to the letter. If God states that certain events will occur, they should occur in the manner stated. If God commands people to perform a ritual or, say, a political action, those people must perform the actions or risk the consequences.

In the Ancient Near East, literature, often based on oral tradition, usually contained sequences which are called the command-fulfillment type. In Ugaritic legend, for instance, King Keret is told to march to Udum and is given a set of detailed instructions. Keret immediately follows those instructions to the letter. The fulfillment section is exactly like the command section aside from its tense, for the imperfect has changed to the perfect.¹

Command-fulfillment sequences are so standard in Ancient Near Eastern literature that if the fulfillment section diverges in any way from the command, something important is going on. In the Bible, many such divergences can be found. We shall see that any such divergence may be a reflection of the Biblical understanding of how God's Word works in history.

Rather than speak in the usual generalizations, let us examine a group of Biblical texts concerning some important figures and events of the 800s B.C.E. If God works in history, His presence will be felt in the so-called "historical" books of the Bible such as I and II Kings. If God's Word has authority in the Bible, if His prophecies are fulfilled, we should see concrete evidence of this authority, this fulfillment, in books of this type.

1. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. Pritchard (Princeton, 1969), pp. 143-4.

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What we will see, instead, is that the very phrase "Word of God" hides complexities, that the shaping of history involves more than words, even the words of God. And we shall learn a lesson in the freedom of God and the freedom of man.

Let us set the scene. Ahab and his Sidonian wife, Jezebel, are king and queen of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They have taken the religion of the Northern Israelites (whom H. L. Ginsberg happily calls Israelians)² and merged it with the religion of the Canaanites, Baalism.

It is an era filled with sins abhorrent to the Biblical historians. After Joshua conquers Jericho, he invokes a curse "of the Lord" on the rebuilding of the city, stating that the rebuilder will lose both his oldest and youngest sons during the re-construction (Joshua 6:26). In Ahab's time, Hiel the Bethelite fortifies Jericho and, surely enough, loses his oldest and youngest sons in the process (I Kings 16:34). The Word of God is in full operation; the curse takes effect, down to the details of this relatively unimportant incident.

It is at this time that one lonely man, Elijah, emerges from obscurity to protest and rebel against the powerful and successful monarchs. His task is formidable; it is overwhelming. Even after his great triumph on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18), or because of it, Elijah finds himself in the gravest personal danger; the future of the true religion is at the lowest possible ebb.

In I Kings 19, Elijah flees, first to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, then out into the desert. He literally prays for death. Those who are familiar with the Book of Jonah will see remarkable resemblances between the beginning of I Kings 19 and the end of that book. God sends an angel with food and drink; Elijah is restored to such an extent that he is able to walk for forty days and forty nights. We see forty days and forty nights and we think about Moses on Mt. Sinai. The allusion is purposeful: Elijah is, whether he knows it or not, on his way to Mount Sinai. When he gets there, he is granted a new revelation. Like Moses, he stands in the entrance of a cave, the cleft of the rock. Like Moses, he witnesses God passing by. But *this* time at Mt. Sinai, God is not in the power of nature; He is not in the mighty wind or the earthquake or the fire. He is in a still small voice, a soft murmuring sound.

God in the still small voice is such a beautiful thought that most of us stop reading at this point.

But, if there is a voice, there must be a message. And, indeed, there is, a concrete, historical, political message which has dramatic implications for Elijah's time. God says to Elijah, in vv. 15-18, that he should go back the way he came and on to the wilderness of Damascus. In Syria, then called Aram, he will anoint Hazael as King. He will then go to the Northern Kingdom on two other missions: He will anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi,

2. The Israelian Heritage of Judaism (New York, 1982).

as King of the Northern Kingdom, and will make Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah, his successor as prophet.

Now I don't know about you, but if I were granted such an incredible demonstration of God's power, if I were granted such a magnificent revelation, I would rush to fulfill the commands of that revelation. The first command is quite clear: Go to Damascus. I, personally, would go to Damascus. I would then anoint Jehu as King and then make Elisha my successor.

But Elijah does not do so. Instead, he goes to Abel-Meholah, off the beaten track, to be sure, and makes Elisha his successor. So we say to ourselves: Abel-Meholah is in the Northern Kingdom, which is closer than Damascus, so he fulfills this command first. Maybe it's not such a bad idea. The missions are dangerous. In case Elijah should be killed, Elisha will fulfill that which is undone.

But Elijah doesn't go to Damascus at all, ever. And he never anoints Jehu to be King.

This is very strange. Why doesn't Elijah do what he is supposed to do?

Is Elijah very much like Jonah, a prophet who runs away from God's command? This is hardly the picture that any of us have. Elijah is a very significant figure in Jewish tradition. A prophet who refuses his mission is hardly a candidate to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

The next chapter, I Kings 20, only makes our problem with Elijah worse. Ben-Hadad, King of Aram, goes to war with Ahab. If, in I Kings 19, God says that Hazael, Jehu and Elisha will reduce Northern Israel to seven thousand true believers, in Ch. 20 we see the same figure, seven thousand, as the number of the troops of wicked Ahab. If, in Ch. 19, Northern Israel will be decimated, in Ch. 20 they win a smashing victory over the very enemy which is supposed to smash *them*. Elijah never appears in Ch. 20 at all.

Ch. 21 is the famous incident involving Naboth and his vineyard. Elijah comes and condemns Ahab. He predicts Ahab's death in the field of Jezreel. We say to ourselves: Now Elijah will go on his missions to Damascus and to Jehu. But Elijah does not go. In fact, Elijah's message is so effective that Ahab repents. God hears his repentance, and tells Elijah that He will not bring the disaster in Ahab's lifetime, but in the lifetime of Ahab's son. So we think: Elijah will go on his missions as soon as Ahab dies. Ahab does die in battle, in Ch. 22, and his son Ahaziah, takes over. Ahaziah is as wicked as his father. But while Elijah condemns Ahaziah for his own sins and predicts an early death for him, he still does not go to Hazael or Jehu. His rush to anoint Elisha in Ch. 19 has had no consequence that we know of, for we have not seen a word about Elisha, despite the activity of other prophets, named and unnamed, in these chapters.

Ahaziah dies after a reign of but two years. Another of Ahab's sons, Jehoram, becomes King. In II Kings 2, Elijah ascends to heaven in a fiery

chariot with fiery horses, in the midst of a whirlwind. He does not die in a natural way, thus giving rise to the many traditions about his return to earth. If Elijah does not die, then we see that God has not only refrained from punishing him for his failure to complete the assigned missions, but has obviously honored him in this most special way.

We now look to Elisha to complete the tasks set for Elijah at Mt. Sinai. Instead, Elisha, who was supposed to destroy all of those who were not killed by Hazael of Jehu, destroys forty-two children who jeer at him. He performs miracles, he predicts victory for King Jehoram and his allies over the Moabites. At one point, in II Kings 6, Elisha strikes the invading Arameans with a blinding light and helps to rid Northern Israel of the enemy. This is all contrary to our expectations.

Finally, in II Kings 8, without preliminaries, we are told that Elisha comes to Damascus when King Ben-Hadad of Aram is ill. Hazael, apparently a general or high-ranking official, is sent to ask Elisha if Ben-Hadad will recover. Elisha tells Hazael to lie and report to his king that he will recover, while telling Hazael that the king will die and that Hazael will succeed him. Hazael goes, lies, and adds to the command by assassinating Ben-Hadad himself.

Elisha has, at long last, completed the mission which was assigned to Elijah back in I Kings 19. But Elisha feels no satisfaction. The text here is moving:

The man of God kept his face expressionless for a long time; and then he wept. "Why does my Lord weep?" asked Hazael. "Because I know," he replied, "what harm you will do to the Israelite people: You will set their fortresses on fire, put their young men to the sword, dash their little ones in pieces, and rip open their pregnant women" (II Kings 8:12)³.

In II Kings 9, Elisha sends one of his disciples to anoint Jehu and gives him strict instructions that he should say: "Thus said the Lord: I anoint you King over Israel." Then, Elisha tells the disciple: "Open the door and flee without delay." But the disciple gives a much longer message as he anoints Jehu, incorporating old prophecies and words of his own. He gives Jehu very complete instructions about all the killing which he is supposed to do (II Kings 9:7-10). The disciple has taken a great deal of freedom in the transmission of Elisha's message.

Also interesting is Elisha's instruction to the disciple to flee after the short message is delivered. Is Elisha afraid for the disciple's life? Is he upset about the mission? Why doesn't Elisha go and do the anointing himself? Is Elisha ambivalent about this mission, as he very obviously was with the mission to Hazael, as Elijah may have been in the first place?

Since the revelation to Elijah on Mt. Sinai, at least five or six years of Ahab's reign, plus the two years of Ahaziah's reign, plus twelve years of Jehoram's rule, have passed. At least a generation has gone by before the commands are fulfilled.

3. Translations are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society Edition, *The Prophets*.

Command and fulfillment. What has happened to the expected sequence of events?

Let us review the usual solutions:

(1) I Kings 19 is a later or independent text which does not relate to the rest of these texts. This solution does not work. The chapter does relate to the other texts. Elisha is never commanded by God to anoint Hazael or Jehu. He would not have engaged in these actions, which were so difficult, even repugnant, to him, without being commanded. Clearly, he is fulfilling the commands made to Elijah. In any case, if I Kings 19 is a later text, why not get the facts correct?

(2) I Kings 19 is misplaced. Fine; but where should it be put? And why is it placed where it is? Why place a text in a position that will give rise to so many questions?

(3) I Kings 19 represents a long-range program. Fine; this is probably true. But God says explicitly that Elijah should go immediately to Damascus, and he simply does not go, not then nor at any other point.

Perhaps we can come up with a fuller answer.

We have seen that God accepts Ahab's repentance and tells Elijah that the punishment will be delayed. God, unlike the kings of the Books of Daniel and Esther, can change His mind. In the Book of Jonah, God accepts the repentance of the Ninevites and, to Jonah's regret, saves the city from its predicted doom. If punishment is really chastisement in order to bring about repentance, and the prediction of punishment is sufficient to bring repentance, then the punishment becomes unnecessary, at least for the present.

God has the freedom to change His words. He is not mired in His predictions. In fact, if He has predicted doom, and that doom for His children can be averted, He is delighted. God's Word, the *Davar* of God, is more than words. God's Word does not bind Him, for nothing binds God. God seeks the righteousness of men, and uses whatever He can to create that righteousness.

God is free and, to at least a certain extent, his prophets have freedom as well. Or better, the prophets understand the essence of God's message in a more profound way than we do.

Another example. Amos predicts Jeroboam II's death by the sword, and could have changed this prophecy when it did not come true. But he does not touch the original prophecy, because it is the sacred word of God, or better, because he knows that the spirit, if not the letter of the prophecy will be fulfilled.⁴ Indeed, the kingdom of Jeroboam II, the Northern Kingdom, will be destroyed not long after Jeroboam's reign.

Elijah does not follow the commands of God as they were instructed. He and his disciple Elisha wait a generation. Why? Perhaps because the timing of the impending disasters does not really matter that much. Per-

4. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, Tr. Moshe Greenberg, (Chicago, 1960), p. 364.

haps because history, which is the arena for God's Word on earth, has a certain logic, a certain momentum, a certain force of its own. Yes, Hazael and Aram will wreak destruction on the Israelians. Yes, Jehu will wreak destruction on the house of Ahab. But at the time of the revelation to Elijah, Ahab was still riding high as a powerful and successful monarch. Hazael, whose father's name we never learn (Assyrian inscriptions confirm this, calling him a "Son of Nobody"),⁵ was probably less than nothing at this point in time. Undoubtedly, Jehu was also insignificant at the time. Elijah was given a long-range forecast which would be modified several times before the hurricane of disaster actually hit the Northern Kingdom.

Elijah seems to understand all of this very well. We have come to the heart of prophecy. A prophet is not just a messenger. Like Elisha's disciple, he adds a great deal of his own.

Prophecy is part God and part man.

Both God and man want and need it this way.

We have devoted a great deal of space to one set of texts because they serve us better than generalizations about the Bible. The revelation to Elijah is a good example of one pole of Biblical authority. Clearly, a great many texts could be brought which show the opposite pole, that the Word of God is transmitted and executed to the letter and that this forms the motivation for these texts. But our example, and all the others like it, should not be ignored.

If the Bible has authority because it is the Word of God, what is the Word of God? Not, in our case, the letters of God's words, not mechanical execution of those words, not the solution of a logical calculation, but the understanding of the organic development of God's plan for His people and for the world. Knowledge of God's word is not so much knowledge of specific facts but the understanding of a reality which, as one scholar put it, "is perceived by acting and suffering with that which occurs." God's activity and wisdom unfold in history in both the earthly and cosmic sense.

Elijah and Elisha roll with the flow of history, but stand over against their age and their people because they understand God's *Davar*, His word, His reality.

The word of God does not just barrel down from the past. This is not the essence of Biblical authority. Reality, history, often take a shape different from the prophecies of God or the prophets or the Bible. Reality is often different from that which was transmitted and recorded as revelation.

Authority, in the Biblical sense, is not always rigid, unbending, unaware of the world. God is very involved in the world, in history.

For God, communication with man may mean taking human form, (Cf. Exodus 24 and 33), or using human forms of speech and writing.

5. *ANET*, p. 280.

Because of this, and because all true communication is a two-way street, the Word, the acting-out of the will, has to change as things move along.

Man does not respond to God's instructions as he should, and so God cannot carry on as He originally intended. Or man does respond in unexpectedly positive ways, and God retracts His threats.

The flexibility, the changeableness of God's Word in the Bible is a paradigm, a model, and a reason for the interpretability of the Bible itself. Since the Bible, in its transmission of this flexibility, and in its retention of different kinds of messages from God, demands to be interpreted in profound ways, later generations who are seeking their way in the light of God's truth rejoice in their mission. To understand the Bible means to interpret it. And so we have inner-Biblical Midrash, and Rabbinic exegesis, and so on until modern scholarship. All these interpretations substantiate and sustain and protect the authority of the Bible. They enable the Bible to continue in its authority.

What, then, gives the Bible its authority? Its demand and ability to be understood.

The authority of the Bible will not be sustained through fundamentalism or any claims to exclusive understanding of the text. The authority of the Bible stems partly from its very complexity. Because the texts, both individually and in combination, are so difficult, we are forced to bring everything we have into play. But while you or I might convince each other occasionally with our interpretations, most of the time we will have to agree to disagree. That result is not bad; on the contrary, it is good. It means that we are individually giving of our very different selves.

But if you insist that you know the truth and I don't, we all have problems. Down that road lie tyranny and war.

We are, obviously, not prophets. But we have to emulate them in at least one respect: We have to see the Word of God in both of its modalities.

First, the Word of God is absolute and must be followed to the letter.⁶ The command is the fulfillment, the prophecy beomes reality.

But the second modality of God's Word, the one we emphasize here, must not be forgotten; it is central to an understanding of Biblical, and modern, religion. God creates His word as a flexible entity that He may change for a variety of reasons. God is not trapped within His commands; He is, of course, more interested in the salvation of man than in seeing things happen in a particular way. And, so, if God commands and predicts doom for sinners, but the sinners repent, as do Ahab and as do the Ninevites, the command and the prediction can be modified or simply forgotten. God has the transcendent freedom to bring ultimate justice to the world, justice which transcends law or words or even love.

6. For a Recent Discussion of the Absolute Pole of the Word of G-D, see Elliot B. Gertel, "Perceiving God's Providence", *Conservative Jewish Theology*, ed. Siegel and Gertel, (N.Y. 1985), pp. 42-55.

The other aspect of the second modality of God's Word is the freedom of man, especially of His prophets and those who understand the underlying content, to modify and even to change that Word.

Our task is to see God's Word in both of its modalities. The authority of the Bible must be seen in all of its power.

We have to find a balance between absolutism and flexibility.

The authority of the Bible lies in its truth, but its truth has many forms, it has seventy faces. We have to look at each of those faces if we are to see even a glimpse of God.

This much we know. God's truth is complex, and any attempt to reduce that complexity to simple terms or one single common denominator is not only bound to fail but undermines the authority of the Bible.

The Torah, the Pentateuch, was not simply the five books of Moses but a Mosaic (to use a not-often-enough used pun), of ancient Israelite understanding of religion and the world based on, and incorporating, the Word of God. It was a compromise, an amalgamation of priestly and Yahwistic and Elohist and Deuteronomistic works. We will never understand the Bible until we can reconcile all the different versions of God's Word, inside the Bible and outside of it.

Some day, everything will be reconciled. Elijah the prophet will come not only to announce the coming of the Messiah but to play his own role in our ultimate salvation. At the end of the tractate *Eduyyot* in the Mishnah, the rabbis give various interpretations about what Elijah will do. The rabbis, who always disagreed on everything, left a number of irreconcilable problems for the day when Elijah will come and harmonize all the differences.

But Elijah will not only harmonize the differences between rabbis; he will bring peace to the world by harmonizing all of the differences in the world. He will bring redemption to all of us.

Elijah will tell us how to read the Biblical texts and, perhaps, at long last, the complexities will all be understood.

But, until then, let us all interpret the Bible as we will, each seeking his own truth in the light of God and in the light of His Word.

Jewish Tales of the Supernatural

HOWARD SCHWARTZ

If you want to discover demons, take sifted ashes and sprinkle them around your bed, and in the morning you will see something like the footprints of a cock. If you want to see them, take the after-birth of a black she-cat, the firstborn of a firstborn, and roast it in fire and grind it to powder and then put some in your eye and you will see them.

(B. *Berachot* 6a)

ONE DAY A BOY PLAYING HIDE-AND-SEEK sees a finger in the hollow trunk of a tree. Assuming he has found his friend, he puts a ring on the finger and, all in jest, pronounces the marriage vows. Subsequently, however, he finds himself wed to a demoness. She, in turn, kills each of his human wives until one of them finds a way to appease her — sharing her husband with her for one hour every day.

This nightmare marriage is recounted in a 16th century Yiddish folktale.¹ Like most Jewish stories of the supernatural, it is focused on one of the most crucial turning points in a person's life. Times of stress, like marriage, birth and death, inevitably become the focus of rituals, superstitions and folklore, and the Jewish tradition is no exception. Indeed, the vast majority of legends and folktales that draw upon the supernatural take place at one of these turning points, or on such critical occasions as Bar Mitzvah, Yom Kippur, and other days of observance, including the Sabbath.

It is the supernatural, after all, that provides an explanation for all kinds of events, especially misfortunes. Surrounded by a myriad of dangers, opposed by both human and demonic enemies, the Jews turned to faith and superstition for an understanding of the world. Thus, a still-birth could be interpreted as the destructive work of the demoness, Lilith, or a sudden death as the punishment of vengeful spirits. These explanations, in turn, eventually became embodied as tales that were often retold in both the written and oral traditions. They tell of wandering spirits, marriage with demons, possession by dybbuks, ghostly visitations, vampires, werewolves, speaking heads, corpses brought to life with the magic of the Name, and every kind of supernatural adversary. These fantasies and nightmares, where danger is often overcome in a supernatural fashion, helped oppressed Jews to find an outlet for their fears, for it is well

1. Cambridge (Trinity College) Yiddish mss. 136, no. 3. 16th century.

known that hearing or reading even the most frightful tales can bring about a catharsis and a release from terror. These folk explanations no longer have a primary place in our vision of the world, of course, but they still invoke and explore the dark side of the human psyche that is as evident today as it was in the time of our ancestors.

The role of the supernatural in Jewish life and lore is one of fascinating contradictions. On the one hand there is the clear biblical injunction against supernatural practices: *There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one that useth divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or one that consulteth a ghost or a familiar spirit, or a necromancer. For whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto the Lord* (Deut. 18:10-12). On the other hand, even in the biblical account of King Saul and the witch of Endor (I Samuel 28) this injunction is ignored as Saul has the witch invoke the spirit of the prophet Samuel. Likewise, sorcery is resorted to on a great many occasions in the rabbinic literature, sorcery not only by witches and sorcerers, but even by some of the most respected rabbis. On one occasion, Rabbi Joshua ben Hanania performs a magical invocation. He scatters flax seeds on a table, waters them so that they instantly take root and grow, then reaches into them to pull out the head of a witch who has cast a damaging spell.² In another tale from the Talmud, Rabbi Jannai diverts a witch who attempts to turn him into an ass, and transforms her into this beast instead.³ These and many other examples clearly reveal the rabbinic ambivalence about the injunction against sorcery, and lead to hair-splitting attempts to define what kind of sorcery is acceptable and what kind forbidden. The conclusion that the rabbis reach distinguishes between sorcerers who work through demons and those who work by pure enchantment. Thus, according to the talmudic sage, Abaye, "If one actually performs magic, he is stoned; if he merely creates an illusion, he is exempt."⁴ While this distinction itself may seem to be an illusion, in many cases it accurately defines the difference between the sorcery of the rabbis and that performed by those who invoked the forces of darkness.

In practice, as well, the differences between sacred magic and sorcery are apparent. While the black magic of the wizards is destructive in intent, that of the rabbis is protective — drawing magic circles that guard against any evil onslaught; using the power of the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable Name of God, to bring the dead to life; or exorcising a dybbuk, the spirit of a dead person who takes possession of the living. But, on occasion, when sufficiently provoked, the wrath of the rabbis is terrible to behold: In his anger at witches who have kidnapped and mutilated the body of a Jew, Rabbi Hayim Vital turns them into black dogs;⁵ Rabbi Shalom Shabazi causes four stories of a building to sink into the ground at his com-

2. Y. San. 7:25d.

3. B. San. 67b.

4. B. San. 67b.

5. *Sefer Maaseh Nissim*, ed., Pinhas David Braverman (Jerusalem, 1966). The story is from Syria, c. 17th century.

mand;⁶ and a rabbi known as Even Haezer brings huge pagan idols to life, commanding them to bow down and serve him until the pagans beg him to stop and agree to cancel a decree against the Jews.⁷

Such great power holds the danger of being abused, and this theme is found in several striking tales, especially that of Rabbi Joseph della Reina, who first tried to force the coming of the Messiah by capturing Asmodeus, king of demons, and his queen, Lilith. Joseph succeeds in capturing them, but falls prey to their deception, is defeated, and afterward becomes a mad wizard, tutored by Lilith in the ways of Black Magic.⁸ Another tale, "The Homunculus of Maimonides,"⁹ portrays the great philosopher and theologian as a sorcerer intent on creating an immortal being of unlimited powers. This has all the earmarks of a folk expression of the attitudes toward Maimonides found in the anti-Maimonidean controversy, in which his opponents portrayed him in the most negative terms. Both tales contain implicit warnings against messianic aspirations, and both emerge from periods dominated by such longings, with attendant false messiahs, especially Shabbatai Zevi in the 17th century.

Most tales, however, show a great reluctance on the part of the rabbis to invoke these supernatural powers, and it is only impending disaster that forces them to do so. The young Baal Shem Tov is forced to confront a werewolf to protect young children,¹⁰ while other rabbis are brought into magical combat with various demons — to save a kidnapped bride-to-be, for example, as in "The Bride of Demons,"¹¹ or to compel demons who have taken possession of a house to appear before a rabbinic court, as in "The Cellar."¹² These tales did not emerge from a vacuum in the Middle Ages, when they flourished, but are an outgrowth, in every respect, of the biblical, rabbinic and folk traditions that preceded them. Jewish tales with supernatural themes are derived from such biblical motifs as the speaking serpent in Eden, or Saul and the witch of Endor — and from virtually every phase of post-biblical Jewish literature, sacred and secular, written and oral. The written sources for these tales include the Apocry-

6. *Hadre Teman*, ed., Nissim Binyamin Gamlieli (Tel Aviv, 1978). This story is from Yemen, collected orally.

7. *Haggadot Ketuot*, published by Louis Ginzberg in *Ha-Goren*, 9: 47. From 16th century Germany.

8. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi, *Iggeret Sod ha-Ge'ullah* (Jerusalem, 1519). A later version is found in *Sippur Rabbi Yosef della Reina* by Shlomo Navarro. A third version is found in *Eder ha-Yekar*, edited by Zalman Rubashov (Shazar) in *Samuel Abba Horodezky Volume*. From 16th century Palestine.

9. *Sippurim: eine Sammlung jüdischer Sagen, Märchen und Geschichten für Völkerkunde* (Wien and Leipzig, 1921). First published in Prague in 1847.

10. Rabbi Dov Baer ben Samuel, *Shivhei ha-Besht*, ed., Samuel A. Horodezky (Berlin, 1922). From 19th century Eastern Europe.

11. *Sefer Maaseh Nissim*. The story is from Germany, c. 18th century.

12. Tsvi Hirsh Kaidanover, *Kav ha-Yashar* (Frankfurt, 1903). "The Cellar" (also known as "The House of Demons") is found in this ethical treatise. The story is from Eastern Europe in the 17th century.

pha, the Pseudepigrapha, the Talmud, the Midrash, medieval Jewish folklore and Hasidic texts. Some variants and additional tales can be found among those collected orally from various Jewish ethnic sources, including those published in this century in Yiddish by Y.L. Cahan and Immanuel Olsvanger,¹³ as well as the tales collected, primarily in Hebrew, by the Israel Folktale Archives.¹⁴ Nor does the tradition end there, for these same legends have been selected by some of the most important modern Jewish authors such as I.L. Peretz, S.Y. Agnon, I.B. Singer, Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick, who have used traditional tales as the basis of short stories, novels, dramas and poetry.

* * *

In some cases it is possible to trace the evolution of a single legend from its biblical inception to its recounting in the Talmud, and from there to the version found in the Midrash and then retold in the Middle Ages in medieval folklore and echoed as well in some Hasidic tales. Here the Jewish literary tradition is unique, for in no other culture is it possible to trace the evolution of legends in written form throughout the ages.

Among those with biblical origins and rabbinic and folk elaborations, none had a greater influence than that of Lilith. It is not an exaggeration to say that much of the demonic realm in Jewish folklore grew out of this multi-faceted legend, which came into being as a commentary on one passage in the Bible, *male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:27). This passage was interpreted by the rabbis to mean that the creation of man and woman was simultaneous, whereas the later accounts of the creations of Adam and Eve appear to be sequential. Working on the assumption that every word in the Bible is literally true, the rabbis interpreted this contradiction to mean that the first passage refers to the creation of Adam's first wife, whom they named Lilith, while the other refers to the creation of Eve.

This initiates the long legend of Lilith, whose name actually appears only once in the Bible, in a passage from Isaiah, *Yea, Lilith shall repose there* (Isaiah 34:14), referring, probably, to a Babylonian night demon. In the post-biblical texts, a few references to Lilith are found in the Talmud, where she is described as a demoness with long, black hair,¹⁵ and a demoness with identical characteristics is found in the apocryphal text,

13. For Y.L. Cahan see *Yiddishe Folkmaysses* (Vilna, 1931) and *Yiddisher Folklor* (Vilna, 1938). For Immanuel Olsvanger, see *Rosinkess mit Mandelen: Aus der Volksliteratur der Ostjuden* (Basel, 1931).

14. To date, the Israel Folktale Archives (IFA), under the directorship of Professors Dov Noy of The Hebrew University and Aliza Shenhar of Haifa University, has collected more than 16,000 tales from every Jewish ethnic group in Israel and has published more than sixty volumes of them.

15. B. *Erubin* 100b.

The Testament of Solomon. The earliest version of the legend that portrays all of the essential aspects of Lilith is *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* in the 11th century.¹⁶

It tells how God created a companion for Adam and named her Lilith. But Lilith and Adam bickered endlessly over matters large and small, with Lilith refusing to let him dominate her in any way. Instead, she insisted that they were equal. Eventually, Lilith pronounced the Ineffable Name of God and flew out of the Garden of Eden to the shore of the Red Sea where she made her home in a cave, taking for lovers all the demons who lived there and giving birth to a great multitude. This explains the proliferation of demons in the world.

Adam complained to God, who sent three angels, Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangelof, to command her to return to Adam. But Lilith refused. Not even the angels who threatened to kill one hundred of her demon offspring a day could move her. Instead, she proclaimed that she had been created to snatch the souls of infants, and she vowed that only if confronted with an amulet bearing the name of the three angels would she do no harm. So widely known was this legend that such amulets became a familiar feature of Jewish life, and are used even today in some Orthodox Jewish circles.

Since then Lilith has sought her revenge by slipping beneath the sheets of men who sleep alone and trying to seduce them. So, too, does she attempt to strangle infants in their cradles. But if she finds the amulet with the names of the three angels on it, along with the words "Out Lilith!", she turns away and does not approach that child.

Once a character was brought into being, the rabbis sought to discern and, in many cases, invent, his or her history. So it is with Lilith, who is to Eve as a siren is to a mermaid: the negative side, as the rabbis saw it, of woman. Lilith is assertive, seductive, and ultimately destructive; Eve is passive, faithful, and supportive. Thus are the opposite poles depicted in the rabbinic sources. This negative characterization of Lilith served as the basis of a substantial body of demonic tales in medieval Jewish folklore and later Hasidic sources. These are not as restrained by the specific intentions of rabbinic commentary and, consequently, they have more imaginative freedom. This process of embellishment has a pronounced tendency to bring together as many previous themes and motifs as possible, yet, at the same time, the new tale somehow takes on a life of its own.

In this fashion the archetype of Lilith became imprinted on Jewish folklore, and she reappears with a thousand names and faces, among them the Queen of Sheba, in early apocryphal, talmudic and midrashic sources as well as in medieval folklore and the later Hasidic tales. So, too, does Lilith play an important role in Kabbalistic texts, one that is almost

16. *Alpha Betha de-Ben Sira*, ed., M. Steinschneider (Berlin, 1868), reprinted in *Otzar Midrashim*, ed., J.D. Eisenstein (New York, 1915).

mythic in nature. The talmudic and midrashic texts, of course, have the seal of rabbinic authority, while the apocryphal texts do not. Nevertheless, the latter had a strong influence on the development of Jewish lore.

Of the apocryphal texts, there are two, *The Book of Tobit* in the Apocrypha and *The Testament of Solomon* in the Pseudepigrapha, that greatly influenced the subsequent direction of demonology in Jewish folklore.¹⁷ *The Testament of Solomon*, estimated to have been written between the first and fourth centuries, has the earliest version of what was to become the Lilith legend. It also serves as the earliest compendium of demons, who appear to King Solomon in succession at his invocation, and it is the earliest text to cast King Solomon in the role of sorcerer, which became the primary model for him in subsequent Jewish lore. Among the demons compelled to appear is one whose name is Obizuth, who has all the witch-like characteristics of Lilith.

Sometime during the early Middle Ages the legend of Lilith, the dominant female demon, merged with the legend of Asmodeus, the king of demons, and she became identified as his queen. Asmodeus was already a famous folk character because of the striking legends about him in the Talmud. One concerns his capture by King Solomon during the time when the Temple was being built, and another describes how Asmodeus overpowered Solomon and threw him a great distance, turning him into a beggar king, and usurped his throne.¹⁸ In retrospect, the merging of the legends of Lilith and Asmodeus, given their prominence, was inevitable.

The folk process invariably embellishes folktales that capture the folk imagination. Thus, the legend of Lilith, which grows out of a single line of Genesis, gave birth to a myriad of legends postulating the existence of another world, by some accounts existing side by side with this one, as close as the other side of the mirror; by others, in its own place, the *Yenne Velt*, Yiddish for the Other World. In either case, the demons were believed to reproduce and proliferate endlessly, creating difficulties at every turn: causing the wine to turn into vinegar, the fire to go out, the man to be impotent, the woman unable to give birth. And, of course, it was Lilith who was blamed every time an infant was lost. Thus, the presence of Lilith and her cohorts was very real, and she served as a symbol of all that was enticing and destructive.

As can be seen, there are two primary aspects of the Lilith legend: as the incarnation of lust, Lilith leads unsuspecting men into sin; in her incarnation as a child-destroying witch, she strangles helpless infants. It is interesting to note that both aspects of this legend seem to have evolved separately, in that there is hardly a tale to be found in which Lilith plays both roles. But the attachment of the witch-like role to the legend of Lilith

17. *The Book of Tobit* is estimated to date from around the 2nd century B.C.E. *The Testament of Solomon*, extant in a Greek version, is believed to date c. 1st-4th centuries.

18. B. *Git.* 68b.

broadens the Lilith archetype to include the most destructive kind of witchcraft as well. Such tales about witches are commonly found in Jewish folklore, as they are in the folklore of all peoples.

This, then, reveals a great deal about the workings of the folk process. One very old legend splits off into several sub-legends, gives birth to a multitude of variants, and is embellished and retold for many centuries in new versions that are themselves embellished and retold until they bear little resemblance to the original. It is clear that, despite their age and familiarity, these supernatural themes retained great power for those who told them and much of this power came from the fact that the stories embody universal fears and fantasies. Lilith is, after all, the projection of the negative fears and desires of the rabbis who created her. If Lilith served no other purpose than to resolve the contradiction in the biblical text, such an extensive legend, with so many ramifications, would never have come into being.

* * *

One theme, in particular, evolved out of the legend of Lilith the seductress — that of marriage with demons. In these tales the demoness is not usually identified as Lilith, but, nonetheless, demonstrates all of her characteristics. One brief tale from *Midrash Tanhuma*,¹⁹ dating from around the 8th or 9th century, sets the pattern for many later tales and, also, sets an important precedent in asserting that intercourse with demons does not constitute prostitution or adultery:

On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, a demon in the shape of a woman came to a pious man and seduced him and made love to him. Afterward the man was very sorry, until Elijah the Prophet came to him and asked him why he was so upset. And he told him all the things that happened to him. And Elijah said: "You are free from sin, for this was a demon." After that the man reported this to his rabbi, who said: "Surely this judgment is true, for Elijah would never have come to a guilty man."

The first and most important variant of this brief tale is *Maaseh Yerushalmi* (The Tale of a Jerusalemite), dating from the 12th century.²⁰ Here a man is forced to marry the daughter of Asmodeus, the king of demons, in order to save his life. Eventually he is permitted to return to his human family for one year, but when he refuses to go back to his demon wife she comes to his city and challenges him before a *Beit Din*, a rabbinic court. Here the rabbis take her side, commanding him either to return with her or to pay the immense sum called for in their wedding contract, and when he still refuses she gives him one last kiss — the kiss of death. *Maaseh Yerushalmi* contains most of the essential elements of the later variants: the

19. *Midrash Tanhuma* 1:20, ed., Solomon Buber (Vilna, 1891).

20. *Maaseh Yerushalmi*, ed., Yehuda L. Zlotnik (Jerusalem, 1946). First published in Constantinople in the 17th century, believed to date from the 13th century, North Africa.

forced or accidental marriage of a man to a demon; an attempt to be freed from the unwanted vows; and a decision reached by a rabbinic court. This decision, however, contradicts the precedent established by Elijah in the tale from *Midrash Tanhuma* — and confirmed in numerous folktales — that such marriages are not valid and binding.

This theme was most popular in the 16th century, both in Eastern Europe and Palestine. In *Maaseh Nissim*,²¹ an important Yiddish collection of stories set in the city of Worms, there is the tale of “The Queen of Sheba” in which a demoness by this name appears in a poor innkeeper’s storeroom and seduces him both with her charms and with bags of silver coins. The variant about the demon in the tree has been mentioned, and there is still another in a tale from 16th century Palestine, “The Finger.”²² Three young men out for a walk one evening find something that looks like a finger sticking out of the earth. As a jest, one of them slips his ring onto it and pronounces the marriage vow. At that instant, without realizing it, he weds himself to a corpse, one who had not known her “hour of joy” while alive, and was not about to let it go now. The existence of such close variants from places so distant seems to confirm a substantial exchange of lore between Europe and the Holy Land in that period, for the versions seem too close to be a coincidence.

Still another variant of this motif is found in “The Cellar,” a story included the famous 18th century ethical text, *Kav HaYashar*.²³ Here a man’s life is threatened by a demon whom he meets in a forest, and he is spared only when he agrees to marry the demon’s daughter. He does so, and they produce many demon offspring. Before his death, the man bestows on the demons the right to live in his cellar. When the man’s human descendants try to move into the long abandoned house, the demons fight them tooth and nail, tormenting them in many ways. At last the matter is brought to a rabbinic court for settlement, and the demons are expelled.

One of the latest versions of this tale, “The Other Side,” dates from 19th century Eastern Europe.²⁴ Here an unsuspecting man is lured to the kingdom of the demons, not far from his own city, and, step by step, falls under their power. They finally wed him to one of their own and then dissolve the illusion, leaving him broken and unable to speak. It is only after the rabbinic court commands the demons to appear and rules against them that the man is freed from their curse.

All of the previous tales on the theme of marriage with demons concern a man married to a demoness. There are, however, a few tales in

21. *Maaseh Nissim* (Yiddish), compiled by Jephtha Yozpa ben Naftali (Amsterdam, 1696). From 16th century Germany.

22. From *Shivhei ha-Ari*, compiled by Shlomo Meinstertl (Jerusalem, 1905). From 16th century Palestine.

23. See note #12.

24. See note #9.

which a woman is wed to a demon, usually by deceit or by force. In "The Demon Bridegroom," found in *The Maaseh Book*,²⁵ dating from the 16th century, a demon disguised as a wealthy nobleman convinces a merchant to betroth his daughter to him. He then takes her directly to Gehenna, Jewish Hell. In "The Bride of Demons," from Germany in the same century, Lilith lures a young girl into coming with her, imprisoning her in order to force her to wed one of her demon sons.

Perhaps the most interesting of these variants is from 19th century Prague, "The Underwater Palace."²⁶ A young woman, Hamina, follows her lover into the Moldau, prepared to end her life, only to discover that he is the demon ruler of the river who makes her his bride. This tale combines two basic types. One is that of marriage with demons, and the other relates to the subplot, about the girl's aunt, whose name is Shifra and who, as a midwife, is brought to the underwater palace to deliver their child. (Note that the aunt's name is the same as that of the midwife in Exodus 1:15).

Such tales, involving both midwives who are needed to deliver a child and *mohalim* who are required to perform the circumcision, are found in both European and Middle-eastern sources. They emphasize the parallels between the lives of humans and those of demons, for the *Yenne Velt* is a distorted mirror image of this world. The older, written versions of this tale almost all concern the *mohel*, who is lead to Gehenna, while the more recent oral versions are almost all about a midwife who is brought to the land of demons. The fact that two such separate narrative types have been combined here demonstrates how the folk process constantly finds ways to remake old themes in new ways, and thus keeps the tale alive.

In one tale of considerable importance in which this theme of marriage with demons is found, it is possible to glimpse the historical kernel underlying it. In "The Demon of the Waters,"²⁷ collected from a Russian immigrant in Israel in the early 1930s, the stairway to a *mikveh*, a ritual bath, collapses, throwing a woman into the river, where she is carried away, while her demonic double emerges from the waters and takes her place. This serves to explain the sudden, inexplicable transformation of the woman from sanity to madness, suggesting to a wise shepherd who sees her that a demon has taken her place. It is not difficult to read between the lines of this tale to discern the human tragedy of madness. The specific naming of the characters, the place and the customs make it clear that not merely a fantasy, but an actual incident, lies behind it.

25. *Maaseh-Buch* #179, published by Jacob ben Abraham of Mezhiresh (Basel, 1602).

26. *Der Golem: Jüdische Märchen und Legenden aus dem alten Prag*, ed., Eduard Petiska, a German translation of *Golem a jine zidovské povesti a pohádky ze staré Prahy* [Czech] (Wiesbaden, 1972).

27. *Otzar ha-Maasiot*, ed., Reuven ben Yakov Naana (Jerusalem, 1961).

* * *

Demons are not the only supernatural beings found in Jewish lore. There are angels, spirits and other imaginary creatures, such as vampires, werewolves, goblins, and ghosts. Sometimes the spirit of one who is dead takes possession of a living being. This is called a *dybbuk* and, from the 16th century on, accounts of possessions by a *dybbuk* multiplied with alarming frequency. These are not folktales in the usual sense, because almost all of the literally hundreds of accounts of such possessions insist that the event actually occurred and give all kinds of specific details about those involved. The pattern is almost always the same: the *dybbuk*, the spirit of one dead, takes possession of its victim. Eventually, the matter is brought to the attention of a rabbi, who interrogates the *dybbuk* and manages to cast it out, usually through the little finger or toe of the victim.

Though possession usually involves a wandering spirit, i.e. a *dybbuk*, there are exceptions in which demons or other evil beings take possession.²⁸ One such unusual account is "The Exorcism of Witches from a Boy's Body,"²⁹ from 19th century Eastern Europe, in which four witches simultaneously take possession of a young boy. As in the other cases of *dybukkim*, it is the power of the Name of God that compels the witches to depart.

Underlying many of these tales is the Jewish concept of sin and its punishment. Sinners are not condemned to eternal punishment, as in Christianity, but to an intense punishment for up to twelve months in Gehenna. Its punishments are the most painful that could be imagined, as is well documented in "The Devil's Fire," where a rabbi follows the Devil into Gehenna, and observes the tortures taking place there.³⁰

In addition to the uniquely Jewish tale types, such as those about a *dybbuk*, virtually all of the traditional types of supernatural tales are to be found in Jewish lore. Though much of this material was taken from the surrounding cultures in which the Jews found themselves and is strongly molded by its source, in many cases the tales are recast in a Jewish context. There is, for example, one about the rabbi who became a werewolf, as well as a famous one about the young Baal Shem Tov defeating an evil sorcerer (actually Satan) who had transformed himself into a werewolf.³¹

One of the most basic types of supernatural tales is, of course, the

28. Accounts of possessions by demons appear much earlier than those of possession by *dybukkim*, and are recorded both in the history of Josephus and in the Talmud. For the account of Josephus see *Antiquities* (8:2.5) and for the talmudic legend of the demon Ben Temalion, see B. *Meilah* 17b.

29. Rabbi Eliyahu Gutacher, *Tsafnat Paaneh* (Brody, 1875).

30. Mss. Oxford Bodleiana Or 135, published in *Revue des Études Juifs*, ed. Israel Levi, Vol. 33 (1896): 50. Also published in *Otzar Midrashim*, ed., J.D. Eisenstein (New York, 1915). According to Professor Eli Yassif, the French manuscript dates from the 13th century.

31. See note #10.

ghost story, describing encounters with spirits of the dead. In Jewish lore the role of the ghost, per se, is a little different, since spirits are most often encountered as *dymbukim* after they have taken possession of the body of a living person. There are, however, more conventional ghost stories, the most famous of all being, of course, about the prophet Samuel, who is invoked by the Witch of Endor for King Saul. Many of the characteristics of the ghost of Samuel, such as his anger at being called back to this world, became the model for subsequent ghost narratives.

Of the supernatural tales in the Talmud, the ghost story is one of the most common types to be found. Rarely, however, do the ghosts haunt those who encounter them; instead, they are only reluctantly drawn into the world of the living. One such tale reports the dialogue between two ghosts who are overheard whispering in a graveyard.³² Still another describes how the corpse of Rabbi Eliezer ben Simeon remains perfectly preserved for ten years after his death, and how his voice comes forth from the attic to reply to the questions that are asked of him.³³ This suggests, in an allegorical manner, how subsequent Jewish generations turned to the ancient sages for guidance and, even though they were dead, they still replied to the questions put to them. This was possible, of course, by consulting the ancient texts, especially the Talmud, where the opinions of the sages are still very much alive.

Ghosts also populate the oppressive world portrayed in *Sefer Hasidim*, attributed to Rabbi Judah the Pious, from Germany in the late 12th or early 13th century. One such tale reports a vision of a man who fell asleep in the synagogue, awoke at midnight and saw many spirits, including two of men who were still alive, wearing prayer shawls. Those two died a few days afterward, and that is why he saw their spirits already among the dead.³⁴

Far less frequent, but still to be found, are stories of vampires, which, while hardly a dominant theme in Jewish lore, appear in one of the oldest texts, *The Testament of Solomon*. Here a vampire sucks the blood of the child of the chief builder of the Temple until King Solomon finds a way to stop him. "Astryiah the Vampire" is the tale of a 12th century German vampire who uses her hair to suck the blood from her victims.³⁵ Another brief tale in *Sefer Hasidim* describes how to be certain that a witch does not come back from the dead to haunt her enemies. This is very reminiscent of the method of killing vampires with a stake in the heart:

Even after a witch dies, she is dangerous. Once a witch was captured and when they were about to put her to death she said: "Even after my death you will not be safe from me." And they said to her: "Tell us, how can we be

32. B. Ber. 18a.

33. B. Baba Mez. 83b-85a.

34. *Sefer Hasidim* #271, Parma edition, Hebrew manuscript de Rossi 33, published by Yehuda Wistynetzki (Berlin, 1891-94). The story is from Germany, c. 11th-12th centuries.

35. *Sefer Hasidim* #1465, Parma edition.

safe from you after you die?" She said: "Take a stick and push it through my cheek so that it enters the earth, and then I will not be able to do any more damage."³⁶

Why the witch revealed this secret is not reported, but these tales are clear evidence of the fear of vampires and witches among the people, and of the counter-measures that they were prepared to take.

Tales of the rabbi-sorcerer are, perhaps, the most commonly found. Moses serves as a magician in several biblical episodes, including the contest with the Egyptian magicians in Pharaoh's court. This, may, indeed, be the true model for the subsequent tales of such contests and magical combats. But it is King Solomon, not Moses, who is the primary model for the Jewish sorcerer. Solomon's exploits are a genre in themselves in Jewish lore, and only Elijah the Prophet is the hero of more stories. Solomon's mastery of magic and his control over the forces of the supernatural was complete. He drew on the power of his magic ring, on which God's Name was engraved and, ultimately, on the power of God. Solomon, however, was a king, and a model was needed for the rabbi-sorcerer. Several rabbis in the Talmud demonstrate supernatural powers, among them Simeon bar Yohai, Joshua ben Hanania, Jannai, and Eliezer ben Hyrcanos, but none of them could be described as a sorcerer.

Among the medieval models for sorcerer-rabbi are Rabbi Samuel the Pious of Regensburg and his son, Rabbi Judah the Pious, whose miracles are recounted in *The Maaseh Book*.³⁷ There is also the legendary Rabbi Adam, who had vast kabbalistic powers at his command. He is the subject of several tales in which he draws upon supernatural objects, such as a magic lamp or mirror, in order to protect Jews from impending danger.³⁸

In addition to Rabbi Adam, there is one other medieval rabbi in particular who is portrayed in Jewish legend as having possessed great supernatural powers. He is Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, who used his supernatural knowledge to protect the Jews from dangers arising out of the blood-libel accusation of which they were so frequently and so unfairly accused in the Middle Ages, often leading to terrible pogroms. Rabbi Loew himself is famous for the creation of the Golem, a man-made man, molded out of clay and brought to life with various magical incantations. This creature, according to the legend, protected the Jews of Prague from many dangers, especially the blood libel, with its disastrous consequences.³⁹

Hasidic legend, as recounted in *Shivhei-ha Besht*, the first collection of

36. Ibid., #63.

37. *Maaseh-Buch* #158-183. See note #25.

38. *Sippure Kedoshim* (Leipzig, 1819) for the tale of the magic mirror, and IFA 3676, collected by Abraham Bachar, for the tale of the magic lamp.

39. Yudel Rosenberg, *Niflaot Maharal* (Piotrkow: 1909). The authenticity of this text is the subject of considerable scholarly controversy. However, earlier tales about Rabbi Loew can be found in other sources, including the edition of *Sippurim* cited in note #9.

tales about the Baal Shem Tov, has Rabbi Adam identify the Baal Shem, even while he was still a boy, as his successor.⁴⁰ Many of the tales of the Baal Shem cast him in the role of sorcerer, but though, like Rabbi Adam, he is heir to a tradition of kabbalistic magic, the power of the Baal Shem seems to derive more from his faith and less from kabbalistic formulas and invocations. In virtually all of these tales, whether or not a rabbi serves as the hero, the evil of the wizard is eventually uncovered and a way is found to stop him. Sometimes the one who defeats him is his own pupil, following the pattern of the tale of the Sorcerer's apprentice, which, itself, is found in many variants.

In the realm of folklore there are, of course, no boundaries. The Jews drew upon the folklores of the surrounding people and the folklore of the Jews made its way into the traditions of these people as well. But even the tales with universal themes, such as those about demons, vampires, werewolves or ghosts, almost always take on a Jewish coloration. In these tales, then, the people found an expression for their fantasies as well as their primal fears, while the act of telling them was, in itself, an affirmation of faith and of the Jewish folk tradition. Above and beyond this, the inherent power of the tale is left to speak for itself.

40. See note #10.

Clouds Like Tractates

EDMUND PENNANT

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory
against forgetting.

— Milan Kundera

The almond tree in full bloom
traces its ancestry beyond Titus,
he who swore he would run a plow
over the Temple mount.

The pollen of that ancestor
was borne by a bee over the ford
of Jabbok, where Jacob wrestled,
forcing the blessing.

Delicately now, the tanks
avoid the little tree,
manoeuvring carefully around it
in the hills above Jerusalem.

Over the tree, clouds like tractates
move briefly in the vision
of airmen who fly for Israel,
sweeping over the Aravah.

They sit in cockpits bejewelled
with memory. In the time it takes
to say, *Thou art the man!*, they roar
from Dan to Beersheba.

The little almond tree shudders
with their passing. On the Shabbat
Jerusalemmites stand under her blossoms,
blessing the gift of forgetfulness.

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The Covenantal Drama: Act Two Begins

WILLIAM ABRAMS

ONE OF THE SACROSANCT COMMUNAL RITES to which all national community organizations are obliged to pay homage is the periodic national convention. Hundreds of delegates foregather, socialize, feast and pass resolutions which usually are predictable and have very little effect on future policy. Occasionally, however, a new theme does emerge which resonates among the delegates and signals a major new departure for the organization.

This is what happened at the triennial Plenary session of Canadian Jewish Congress which took place in May, 1986, in Toronto with an attendance of over nine hundred delegates. CJC is the single national umbrella organization for Canadian Jewry, to which all Jewish organizations across the country belong. Since it represents all facets of Jewish life — religious, secular, Zionist, Yiddishist, philanthropic, etc. — very seldom does a new theme surface on which a strong consensus can be found. The two classic community concerns — anti-Semitism and Israel — usually continue to dominate the discussions.

This time, however, experienced Congress watchers noted an unusual unanimity of focus by Congress leadership on a theme not previously emphasized: social action by Congress in support of general, as well as specifically Jewish, causes. This development marks a radical shift in Congress priorities, with sociological, psychological and even theological implications that deserve serious analysis.

Even before the start of the Plenary, the new theme was sounded by Milton Harris, outgoing president, in an interview in *Viewpoints*:

Whereas, in the past, our Jewish tradition has tended toward particularism, in a free and open society particularism is not going to be the answer to the survival of our people in the Diaspora. We have to express the universal nature of our Judaism, and that means a much more active involvement in human rights issues.¹

In his keynote speech at the Plenary, Rabbi Gunther Plaut, immediate past president of Congress, warned that the Canadian Jewish community is dangerously isolated from society because of its lack of participation in “so-called non-Jewish causes.” Alan Rose, national executive vice-president, said that while Jews in the past have fought for their right to be equal to other groups, this generation must now fight for the right of oth-

1. *Viewpoints*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, May 1, 1986.

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ers also to be different in Canada's multicultural society. And, in her first speech, newly-elected President Dorothy Reitman called for the creation of a task force to address the recommendation of the delegates for social action on a broad range of topics.

Obviously, for Canadian Jewry, social action appears to be an idea whose time has come. This does not mean that this is the first time such a theme has been heard in Congress deliberations, but it is the first time that the term has been so clearly defined as meaning social action by Jews on behalf of society in general, and not social action for Jewish causes only. This was emphasized by all speakers. Rabbi Plaut castigated the Jewish community for past attitudes:

Our world view is narrow and self-centered; we care for justice, so it appears, only when Jews are involved. I even hear it said: "Nobody worried about us during the Holocaust, so let them worry about themselves at this time." Such an attitude is dreadful and immoral.

What is novel and remarkable about all this is not the emphasis on the primacy of social justice, for that has always been a basic precept in Judaism, second only to the belief in monotheism itself. What is new is the contention that Jews should participate in open and highly visible *action* on behalf of social justice for deprived and oppressed people anywhere in the world.

That tells us something new, not about Judaism, but about Jewish self-perception, for it is that self-perception which has undergone a radical — even revolutionary — change. If we assume, as we are entitled to do, based on past experience, that Canadian and American Jews share a similar self-perception, it means that, for the first time in 2,000 years, the majority of Jews in the world no longer regard themselves as a community of victims.

Most of World Jewry is to be found today in three areas: North America, the U.S.S.R. and Israel. And, in two of these areas, the Jews are, in fact, no longer powerless victims of oppression and persecution. Not only are they free politically, but even the social and economic barriers to their advancement, which were prevalent until the Second World War, have been removed.

As a result, Jews are better educated and more affluent than almost any other minority group in North America, and their self-confidence has begun to grow — though very slowly. After two millennia of pariah status, this slow growth in self-confidence is, of course, understandable. Its emergence can be traced in three stages by studying changing strategies adopted by Jewish community leadership vis-à-vis the general society.

The first stage was *shtadlanut*. Community leaders, whose wealth brought them connections in the corridors of power, tried to improve the situation of the Jewish community by quiet diplomacy only, so as not to alert the anti-Semites. The second stage marked the growth of organiza-

tions such as the Canadian Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Congress and B'nai Brith, whose leaders had acquired the confidence to speak out publicly, but on behalf of Jewish rights only. The demand now being heard, that Jews should speak and act on behalf of social justice for all persons who are disadvantaged by tyranny, oppression or poverty, marks the third stage in this change in the self-perception of North American Jews. For the first time in post-Biblical history, the Jew has internalized the fact that he need no longer regard himself as a victim and pariah and must now direct his efforts toward improving the situation of groups more disadvantaged than himself.

Acceptance of this new status for the Jew is by no means universal. It is a well-known psychological maxim that even a negative self-image, if long-standing, becomes difficult to shed; and this has proven true in the Jewish community as well. Rabbi Plaut's strictures against those who still refuse any involvement with non-Jewish causes are cogent and necessary. Many Jews today accept the need for interfaith dialogue but still reject interfaith social action. Ironically, the emergence of the State of Israel has provided a new rationale for this stance. Its proponents maintain that any time, energy or money which Jews can spare from local needs (Jewish, of course) should go to support Israel rather than be diverted to non-Jewish causes.

This is not to say that such Jews are lacking in human sympathy and concern; it is to say that they are lacking in courage. They find it impossible to discard the victim mentality, and their primary concern, born of fear, is not whether a policy is morally right or even traditionally Jewish but whether it is "good for the Jews." They are guilty of one of the peculiarly Jewish sins, which we recite as part of the Yom Kippur *al het* prayers: the sin of the "terror of the heart."

Another interesting illustration of the difficulty felt by some Jews in discarding the victim mentality is the reception accorded to a recent book by Charles Silberman, *A Certain People*. Although — or perhaps because — Silberman presents a positive and optimistic assessment of the future of Judaism and of Jews, his book has evoked mixed reactions, with a goodly minority claiming that his view of the Jewish condition today is overly optimistic and naive. Their attitude recalls the old joke: If a man keeps his head when people all around are losing theirs, he doesn't understand the situation. Abba Eban neatly summed up this kind of Jewish attitude when he said: "Jews are a people who won't take 'yes' for an answer." However, the recent developments that we have outlined in Jewish self-perception have led to a decision that it is time to amend Eban's epigram to read: "Jews *used* to be a people who . . ." That a major change in the sociological condition of Diaspora Jews has now taken place is undeniable.

* * * *

This watershed event in Jewish history has theological as well as sociological implications. The effort in the modern period to spell out a basic Jewish theology has stressed two tenets: the first is ethical monotheism, the belief in one God who created the world and man, and who demands of man ethical behaviour. The second is belief in the covenantal relationship established at Sinai between God and the Jews, when they were “chosen” to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Over the centuries, normative Judaism, defined by rabbinic law, the Halakhah, has had to be reinterpreted and amended to adjust to the unfolding drama of history. This Judaism, while making room for it, does not, itself, seek a path toward union with the godhead. Nor does it, in itself, seek to penetrate the mind of God and determine His purpose in bringing the world into existence. The objective of normative Judaism is to determine what God requires us — His chosen people — to do in this world, and the only indications that we have as to whether we have correctly divined our role in the working out of God’s plan are the developments which transpire as history unfolds. Paradoxically, the best analogy that can be found lies in an area not usually associated with religion: the scientific discipline. A scientist collects data under controlled conditions; when he has what he deems to be sufficient evidence, he adumbrates a hypothesis which he feels explains the data; if subsequent data do not conform to his original hypothesis, he amends it to take the new data into account.

Similarly, since our God is a God of history, modern Jewish theologians and their rabbinic predecessors study historical developments and attempt to deduce appropriate theological principles, which will then indicate to Jews how they are to conduct themselves.

As new historical vicissitudes occur, amendments to previous beliefs, as crystallized in Halakhah, have to be developed to explain these new events; even more importantly, the role of the Jews must then be adjusted so as to conform to these new theological interpretations.

Fundamentalist Orthodoxy takes a contrary view, preferring to wrap itself in an ahistorical cocoon. (In the October-November 1983 issue of *Viewpoints*, Professor Emil Fackenheim describes a dialogue between himself and Dr. Yeshayahu Leibowitz on Dr. Fackenheim’s book *To Mend the World*. He writes: Dr. Leibowitz takes the position that the Holocaust was a historical accident, with no theological or historical significance whatsoever. In Dr. Leibowitz’s words: “From the religious point of view, history is indifferent, except for deeds, passive or active, which derive from the intention of the service of God.”)

Two millenia ago, three historical events of paramount significance took place at approximately the same time — the disastrous rebellions of 70 C.E. and 135 C.E., and the advent of Christianity. These posed the greatest challenge ever to be faced by the belief systems of Judaism.

Traumatic as the wars were, the latter development proved more

deleterious to the now dispersed Jewish people. Faced with the refusal by the Jews to accept the Christian proclamation of the divinity of Jesus, Christianity introduced to the world the nefarious concept of anti-Semitism, or, more accurately, anti-Judaism. This was not an ordinary case of the “dislike of the unlike” that is a characteristic of most groups with common cultural traits. Because of its theological overtones, this was a unique and especially vicious form of hatred. In an article in the April 1986 issue of *Midstream*, the editor, Joel Carmichael, analyzes the peculiar “mystical” quality of Christian anti-Semitism, which explains both its virulence and its durability. He indicates that it differs from ordinary xenophobia in that it ascribes the Jews’ refusal to accept Jesus not only to their stubbornness but to a demonic element in their very nature that makes them *ipso facto* agents of Satan forever. As such, they have to be kept permanently in a “pariah” status. Ironically, Carmichael points out, this notion also

acted as a safeguard of Jewish existence. Indeed it was to demonstrate the very fact of their degradation and humiliation as enemies of Jesus Christ, Light of the World, that the Jews had to be preserved by the Church — in that degraded condition.

Obviously, Jews had to find their own explanation for the terrible misfortunes that had befallen them. This was done, not by the introduction of new theological concepts, but by the reiteration of the classic theme of the Jewish prophets: divine punishment for sins, to be ended by a recognition of guilt and a return to Jewish ritual practices and ethical behaviour.

In hindsight, this prescription succeeded sociologically in that it helped the Jews to survive as a scattered and powerless minority by clinging to their unique traditions and way of life; today, however, it seems theologically inadequate because it did not come to grips with two fundamental theological problems. The first was the tremendous disproportion and lack of symmetry between the sufferings of the Jews and the crimes imputed to them: 2,000 years of unrelenting persecution seem to be simply too great a punishment for a just God to impose even on a wayward people. The second was the difficulty of comprehending how the Jews could possibly fulfill the role assigned to them by the Covenant, while struggling for mere survival. The outlines of a resolution of these theological dilemmas are only now beginning to emerge, brought about, once again, by the dynamics of history.

Modern history begins with the Enlightenment, which brought in its wake the burgeoning of universal education and the resulting spread of rational and scientific modes of thought in the Western world. One of the many consequences was the rise of secularism, which prompted a rapid decline in the influence of Christianity itself. This led to the erosion of Christian “mystical” anti-Semitism and the beginning of the political and economic emancipation of the Jews. Obviously, centuries of hatred, with

such profound subconscious and irrational roots, could not disappear overnight, and we are all familiar with the repeated outbreaks of anti-Semitic persecution in the last two centuries, climaxed by the horrendous obscenity of the Holocaust. But concurrently and less dramatically, the dismantling of institutionalized obstacles to political, economic and social equality continued, so that Diaspora Jews in our day find that they are finally accepted as equal members of society. Even more important is the fact that this reality has penetrated to the Jewish psyche.

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This brings us back to the Congress Plenary and the remarkable unanimity with which leaders called for a high priority for social action by Canadian Jews. Despite possible disagreement by secular Jews, the religious Jew cannot fail to see in this development a manifestation of the classical Jewish theological doctrine of *tikkun olam*, or the "mending of the world."

This doctrine of *tikkun olam* stems from the mystical concept of Messianism. Jewish Messianism, however, adumbrated a unique role for the Jew in that he became a partner in hastening the arrival of the Messiah by what was then called *tikkun olam*, a major aspect of which we today call social action: action to mend the ills of the world by combatting war, poverty and oppression.

Jewish theologians throughout the centuries have consistently emphasized the partnership between God and man to redeem the world and continue to do so to the present day.² A famous epigram by Franz Kafka summarizes this notion: "The Messiah will come only when he is no longer needed."

Here lies the explanation of the remarkable fact that after two millennia of unrelenting oppression and only four decades of freedom, Canadian Jews appear ready to revert to the classic role assigned to them by the Covenant: to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, engaged in *tikkun olam*. Obviously, this sense of covenantal obligation has remained deeply imbedded in the Jewish psyche, ready to resurface when the storms of anti-Semitism abated, as they are now doing.

Perhaps the time has come for a further re-interpretation of Jewish theology which would account for this astonishingly rapid transformation in Jewish self-perception and would also resolve the two theological problems outlined above: the disproportion between Jewish sin and Jewish suffering and the impossibility for Jews of fulfilling the covenantal role during two millennia of "pariah" status.

Perhaps history is teaching us that the Covenantal Drama is, in fact, a cosmic two-part drama, and what we are now witnessing is the conclusion

2. Most notably, A.J. Heschel, cf. *God in Search of Man*.

of the first act. This would mean that the 2,000-year exile should be viewed, not as punishment for past sins, but as a necessary preparation for the new challenges which now face the Jewish people. (An obvious parallel would be the forty years of desert wandering undergone by the Israelites in preparation for the entry into the Promised Land.) If it be said that this would seem a preparation of unconscionable duration, let me quote: "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night" (Psalms 90: v. 4).

Judaism has always maintained that the concept of "chosenness" did not imply, as many of our detractors have maintained, innate genetic superiority. Perhaps, therefore, it was necessary for the Jews, having been chosen, to undergo two millenia of wandering in the desert of dispersion and anti-Semitism so that hatred of injustice, cruelty and oppression would be bred into their very flesh and bone. Now they are prepared for the raising of the curtain of history on Act Two of the Covenantal Drama — in which the Jews, who for so long have had to turn inward, to search their souls, to endure, and to keep the faith, are finally called upon to turn outward to the world and actively begin their task of *tikkun olam*.

If those Jews who cannot take "yes" for an answer should scornfully dismiss this concept as far-fetched and fanciful, I would tell them the following classic Jewish tale: A certain Jew was brought before a cruel king for a minor offence and condemned to death. He said: "Your majesty, I believe you have a favorite horse. If you will grant me a year's reprieve, I will teach your horse to swim under water." Intrigued, the king agreed. The Jew's friends derided him, saying: "You know very well that a horse cannot swim under water." Whereupon the Jew replied: "In a year, many things can happen. The horse may die, the king may die, and — who knows — perhaps with God's help, I may actually be able to teach the horse to swim under water."

Similarly, I would add: "If the Jews seriously apply themselves to the task of *tikkun olam*, three things can happen: The Jews will become better Jews and, therefore, better human beings; the world will become a better place to live in; and — who knows — perhaps with God's help, we may actually be able to hasten the coming of the Messiah.

Prophets or Profits?

Liberal Lawyers and Jewish Tradition

JEROLD S. AUERBACH

THE EFFORT TO INTEGRATE JEWISH AND professional commitments surely is one of the difficult challenges of modern life. Most American Jews rigorously segregate their public and private activities. Loyal to one of the sacred precepts of Enlightenment theory, they are Jews in synagogue and home, perhaps, but they are Americans everywhere else, especially at work. To unify their separate selves, Jews are occasionally tempted to posit connections between Jewish identity and their political preferences or career choices. With American Jews so conspicuously overrepresented in the professions, certain correlations are self-evident and, by now, self-explanatory. But the further away one moves from the rabbinate, the more tenuous is the linkage.

The difficulties begin, as Donna Arzt's study of "The People's Lawyers" (JUDAISM, Winter 1986) makes all too apparent, when current career choices are linked to "traditional" Jewish values. The problem is at least two-fold: (1) the values may not be traditional, or even Jewish, but only the retrospective wish-projections of modern secular Jews; (2) if the values are, indeed, traditional and Jewish, there is no plausible theory to explain their transmission over a three-thousand-year period, especially to "recipients" who are barely identifiable as Jews and rarely, if ever, choose so to identify themselves.

It is doubtless true, as Ms. Arzt asserts, that Jews are over-represented among public interest lawyers, the good guys in a profession more distinguished for its pursuit of private profit than public service. But the career preferences of Jewish lawyers are far more complex than any simple correlation between Jewishness and public interest law might imply. Indeed, Ms. Arzt's sample is strikingly atypical of Jewish lawyers, relatively few of whom have shared the *pro bono* commitments of her favored few. If there is something particularly Jewish about being a public interest lawyer, there must be something even more particularly Jewish about being a *private* interest lawyer, since the overwhelming majority of Jewish lawyers is (and always was) committed to maximizing income, not justice.

Ms. Arzt's hypothesis is seriously weakened by the undiscernible

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identity of her "group." It includes Jewish lawyers whose entire professional careers were devoted to public interest law (Nathan Margold); some who had virtually no public interest law practice (Benjamin Cardozo, Joseph Proskauer); and some whose lucrative private practice was occasionally, if brilliantly, punctuated by a public interest case or cause (Abe Fortas). Politically radical lawyers (William Kunstler, Leonard Boudin) are indiscriminately mixed with liberal Democrats (Morris Abram, Arthur Goldberg) and conservative Republicans (Irving Kaufman and, after 1932, Proskauer). Defenders of native Americans (Margold) and blacks (Jack Greenberg) are mixed with defenders of the American Nazi Party (Arieh Neier). Even illicit connivance with the FBI (Morris Ernst) and capitulation to McCarthyism (Kaufman) is not a disqualification. Politics may make strange bedfellows, but Jewish tradition is more selective.

Professional activity and political preferences aside, the group identity further disintegrates if Jewish identification is isolated as a factor. Among those with known commitments, Louis Brandeis was, belatedly, a Zionist; Proskauer and Jerome Frank were fervently anti-Zionist. Although Herbert Ehrmann, Morris Abram, and Alan Dershowitz strongly identified with Jewish issues, all but a handful of Ms. Arzt's sample never did so. (Several, one has good reason to suspect, would even deny the validity of explicitly Jewish concerns.) As she concedes, Jewish public interest lawyers have "not been consciously aware of any connection between their ethnic background and professional choice."

Far more damaging to her thesis, however, is their evident lack of awareness of any connection between their ethnic background and themselves. But for the accident of birth many of them would not be Jews at all, even by the most inclusive of definitions. The evidence suggests, overwhelmingly, that most Jewish public interest lawyers are non-Jewish Jews. Perhaps the only tenable conclusion, therefore, is that the least affiliated, least identifiable Jews are most likely to become public interest lawyers. Why? Not because the correlation between Jewishness and public interest law is so strong, but because it is so weak.

Ms. Arzt offers six possible links between Jewishness and professional choice: historical, psychological, theological, sociological, political, and jurisprudential. She is patently uneasy with both the historical and psychological explanations, which easily lend themselves to motivation rooted in calculated self-interest. The historical explanation might posit Jewish liberalism merely as a reflex against discrimination, an understandable if not especially laudable response. (She prefers, but does not document, "a kind of loyalty to the Jewish 'tradition' of public service.") The psychological explanation is equally bereft of idealistic content, whether it suggests identification with the oppressed by (Jewish) victims of oppression, or implies that protecting others is a recognized form of self-protection. (Ms. Arzt fails to consider the abundant psychological evidence suggesting that victims are far likelier to identify with their

oppressors than with other victims.) Yearning to find “purer, less selfish motivations,” Ms. Arzt abandons history and psychology for theology.

The theological explanation, on the surface, is the most inviting, for it has the deepest roots in Jewish tradition. Ms. Arzt suggests that “traditional Judaic sources exist for virtually every aspect of modern public interest law.” (Problematically, however, traditional Jewish sources also exist for military conquest, slavery, plunder, and slaying the Amalekites.) But there is a fatal flaw in the theological theory: any hypothesis that links Jews to Jewish tradition must demonstrate that they know it, or at least have a passing acquaintance with it. Sadly, there is no such evidence for public interest lawyers. Most of them have no evident knowledge of the tradition, while those Jewish lawyers who are the most knowledgeable about their traditions are far more likely to be corporate law-firm partners than store-front lawyers.

The sociological and political theories collapse into each other. Although few American Jews are acquainted with Jewish law, religion, or history, they presumably have absorbed, in “secularized form,” ancient Biblical prescriptions. There is, Ms. Arzt wants to believe, “a latent component of Jewishness . . . that cannot be lost through assimilation, a timeless, Jewish political style that will live on.” That component, she suggests, is political activism and morality, a “surrogate religion” for modern Jews. It expresses their “messianic fervor” for a better world, and it cannot be dissipated over time.

These days, however, messianic fervor is a dubious virtue and it is not clear that Jews should wish to monopolize it. If it indeed measures Jewishness, could it be that the *mullahs* in Iran and the *Hizbollah* in Lebanon are more Jewish than the Jews? If mere morality, rather than messianism, is the distinctive Jewish trait, might we not consider moral purity, at least in part, as a rather ignoble attribute of powerlessness? Where Jews actually exercise power, as in Israel, moral purity must (and, fortunately, usually does) yield to other considerations — especially the protection of Jewish safety and lives.

There is one remaining link: “a jurisprudential tradition with which individual Jewish lawyers can identify, with self-recognition and pride.” That tradition, according to Ms. Arzt, consists of “a dynamic view of law, that it is changing and made for man”; a respect for constitutionalism, especially the protection of individual rights under law; and “a Talmudic style of inquiry” which generates relentless questioning of the existing political and social system. Once those “Jewish traditions” are woven together and interlaced with the threads of prophetic justice and mercy, they depict, wondrously, the very image of a modern Jewish public interest lawyer.

But the “Jewish tradition” that Ms. Arzt posits is neither Jewish nor traditional. That is precisely why so many marginal Jews, of liberal or radical political persuasions, adhere to it. The correct name of her favored

tradition is secular liberalism. Its appeal to Jews, a product of the Enlightenment and Emancipation, is less than two centuries old. In the United States it is a far more recent attachment. Even the most liberal Reform Jews did not actively identify with the struggle for social justice in the public arena until early in this century. (Their founding father, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, was a passionate critic of abolitionists, not of slavery.) Although Reformers, like Jewish socialists before them and Jewish liberals ever since, claimed historical attachment to the prophetic legacy, all were far closer to the American liberal tradition than to the Prophets. Their attachments have demonstrated that in the United States, as in other modern Western nations with small Jewish minorities, altruism has defined Jewish self-interest, while universalism long ago became the characteristic form of Jewish particularism.

Identification with the “prophetic tradition” was compelling, for it offered American Jews a fig-leaf of Jewish respectability as they abandoned Judaism. But it was their secular liberal identity, not any attachment to Jewish tradition, that enabled them to feel comfortable as Jews in American society. Their abiding loyalty was to the *American* tradition of political liberalism, and to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the new testament of American democracy. Any resemblance between those documents and the Bible, however, is not only purely coincidental but altogether illusory.

Space does not permit a fully elaborated statement, or even a refined condensation, of Jewish law, prophetic justice, or the unity between them (to say nothing of their remoteness from American liberalism). Suffice it to say that the sanctification of the prophets for their social justice “liberalism” expresses a modern — and distinctively Christian — mentality. There is little in traditional Judaism to support it. As tempting as it is to see the prophets as the precursors of everything from Marxian socialism through Reform Judaism to public interest law, the prophets served only one purpose in Jewish tradition. They were God’s messengers to Israel, bringing God’s word to His people and reminding them of their covenant obligations. The prophetic message expressed an abiding commitment to the divine source of religious and legal authority. The prophets were fervent defenders of the faith, and the legal foundation upon which it rested.

The law of ancient Israel, quite contrary to anything in the American legal tradition, expressed the unity of divine revelation, law, morality, and cultic ritual. Traditional Jewish law was *religious* law. Even the most secular sounding concepts — including “justice” — were intimately entwined, as Hosea and Micah boldly proclaimed, with the obligation to walk with God and obey His commandments. Despite the travails of ancient Israel, which included destruction of the Temples and dispersion into exile, the legal framework of traditional Judaism endured. For eighteen centuries Jewish communal life was governed within the boundaries

of *halakhah*. That legal tradition, in form and substance, had nothing to do with the passing fancies of modern liberalism, which is precisely why modern liberal Jews rejected it and why those who observed *halakhah* rejected liberalism.

The American tradition of liberal legalism — the politics of reform under the rule of law — is an altogether different tradition. American jurists like Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., theorists like Roscoe Pound, and lawyers like Louis Brandeis wanted only to disentangle law from morality, and religion from politics. Holmes, a cynical Darwinist, despised efforts at social uplift. Law, for him, was neither moral nor divinely inspired; rather, it was merely an expression of the felt necessities of the time. Pound (citing *Leviticus* 19) dismissed Israelite society as hopelessly primitive because it did not differentiate between law, morality, and ritual. Brandeis was not inspired by Jewish tradition, of which (by his own confession) he was altogether ignorant, but by the *polis* of ancient Greece — and, ironically, by the Massachusetts Bay Puritans, who were far more dedicated to establishing a replica of Israel's Bible Commonwealth in America than are those secular Jews who claim attachment to the Biblical tradition. Among liberal Jewish lawyers, from Brandeis to realist Jerome Frank to the contemporary activists on Ms. Arzt's list, no one has offered even the most tenuous connection between his liberal legalism and Jewish tradition. Perhaps, as she suggests, they are unaware of it; they may even have unconsciously absorbed it. More likely, their silence suggests that it does not exist.

With more passion than precision, American Jewish liberals conflate the American and Jewish traditions. Jewish texts are still celebrated for their anticipation of the basic principles of American democracy, especially for their transmission of liberty and law, intact, from the Bible to the Constitution. But that reading of Jewish history has been designed to justify Americanization, not to celebrate Judaism. Jewish law, rooted in divine revelation, spans the entire range of human activity, while the American Constitution, infinitely more restricted in its scope, was authored by "We the People." Jewish law, inherently communal, defines a covenantal relationship between God and the children of Israel. American law, by contrast, protects individual rights; not only is it indifferent to communal claims but it is actively hostile to them. The American separation of religion and state, and the "wall" metaphor that depicts it, is altogether foreign to the Jewish legal tradition. In Judaism, of course, the Wall is not a metaphor of separation, but the most tangible symbolic remnant of that holy site in ancient Israel where divine legal obligation and religious ritual were fused.

The cultures of traditional Judaism and modern Americanism both are highly legalistic. But the link between them, paradoxically, is their pervasive differences, not their similarity. As Jews abandoned one legal culture for another, on their journey to acculturation, they shed their

Eastern European rags for the robes of American legal prominence and power. Their fidelity to tradition, such as it was, was not to Jewish tradition, which most of them rejected (otherwise why come to America?), but to the American liberal tradition. It bestowed substantial benefits, promising a secure foothold in American society, full citizenship rights, equal opportunity, and the magnetic lure of acquisitive success. These were worthy American promises and notable Jewish achievements. But surely it is time to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the Jewish and American traditions. Specious attachments, designed to comfort Jews who abandon Judaism, may be good propaganda for Americanization but they are bad history.

Any attempt to link the career choices of modern American Jews to Jewish tradition is conceptually hazardous and, ultimately, unpersuasive. Is the preponderance of Jewish musicians attributable to Miriam's skillful playing of the timbrel? Were the Rosenbergs, or Jonathan Pollard, spiritual descendants of the spies sent by Moses into Canaan? Perhaps American Jewish lawyers and judges have modeled their career choices after Joseph, the most renowned court Jew in the Bible. Such speculation is endless. It may simply be wiser to acknowledge that the erosion of tradition, not its preservation, encourages modern Jews to become public interest lawyers. Rarely do they identify with their people or its history. Instead, they stand on the shifting sands of secular liberalism, serving any good cause that comes their way as long as it is conspicuously lacking in Jewish content. They may advance the cause of American justice, but they are far removed from Jewish tradition.

In Defense of Jewish Public Interest Lawyers

DONNA E. ARZT

IN HIS ZEAL TO CONTRADICT MY THESIS IN "The People's Lawyers: The Predominance of Jews in Public Interest Law," (JUDAISM Winter 1986), that Jews have played a disproportionately significant role in various fields of public interest law, Jerold Auerbach invokes fallacies of logic and ultimately misses the point of the article.

The premise of my piece is that a high percentage of public interest lawyers are Jews (higher than their ratio in the lawyer — and general — American population), and that a high proportion of Jewish lawyers have committed all or part of their careers to serving the public (higher than the percentage among non-Jewish lawyers). Although no reliable, or even unreliable, statistical studies have been conducted either to prove or to disprove these assertions, I have brought together enough prominent names and personal histories to lend serious credibility to the point. By contrast, Professor Auerbach premises his rejoinder on the mere assertion to the contrary.¹

Professor Auerbach considers it "damaging to (my) thesis" that the Jewish lawyers I describe are essentially "non-Jewish Jews" who are evidently lacking in "awareness of any connection between their ethnic background" and their career paths. Without the opportunity to examine unpublished sources and to conduct personal interviews, I would hesitate to make such a bald assumption. At any rate, the fact that such published memoirs do not readily exist was the very motivation for my exploring the issue and proposing six theories to explain the unconscious link.

Professor Auerbach then goes on to posit a dichotomy between "liberalism" — presumably the values of social justice, democracy, liberty and equality — and "traditional Judaism," that is *halakhah*. This is a dangerous juxtaposition, one that is currently popular among certain segments of Israeli society, but denied outright by numerous Judaic scholars and

1. "The overwhelming majority of Jewish lawyers is (and always was) committed to maximizing income, not justice." ("Prophets or Profits? Liberal Lawyers and Jewish Tradition," p. 360). See also J. Auerbach, "From Rags to Robes: The Legal Profession, Social Mobility and the American Jewish Experience," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LXVI, 249 (Dec. 1976).

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intellectuals.² His statement that “modern liberal Jews rejected (*halakhah*)” and “those who observed *halakhah* rejected liberalism,”³ would be rejected in turn by many modern Orthodox and Conservative Jews living in Israel, America and elsewhere. Moreover, as a history professor, Auerbach should know better than to claim that Jewish immigrants came to America in order to reject Jewish tradition.⁴ They came to escape persecution and dismal economic and social conditions; any rejection of tradition was a post-migration side-effect, not a motivating force.

He is right that the American separation of church and state is foreign to the Jewish legal tradition. But it is practically the only such disparate “liberal” value and not necessarily an essential one.⁵ Great Britain, for instance, has managed to protect civil rights and liberties without dismantling its Established Church. Somehow, despite Professor Auerbach’s negativistic grumblings, the democratic Israeli Knesset has seen fit to require judges to decide cases “in the light of the principles of freedom, justice, equity and peace of Israel’s heritage,”⁶ and the Israeli Supreme Court has ruled that legislation is to be interpreted as consistent with the 1948 Declaration of Independence,⁷ which reads in relevant part:

The State of Israel will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisioned by the prophets of Israel.

American Jewish public interest lawyers are likewise acting out the vision of Isaiah, Micah, Ben Gurion et al.

The defense rests.

2. See, e.g., J. Neusner, “Conflict with Religious Law,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Nov. 11, 1985): 8; M. Syrkin, “False Messianism From Brooklyn,” *Midstream* (Dec. 1984): 40; and M. Odenheimer, “Kahane’s Distortions” (Letter to the Editor), *Moment* (Dec. 1985): 3.

3. “Prophets or Profits?” p. 364.

4. “Otherwise why come to America?” (Ibid., p. 365). At the time of the immigration of most of American Jews, the future of Palestine was unclear and alternatives to the refuge of America were slim — as Professor Auerbach surely knows.

5. The difficulty in resolving this conflict — whether to legalize the separation or not — was the primary obstacle to the adoption of an Israeli Constitution or Bill of Rights at the founding of the State. See R. Gavison, “The Controversy Over Israel’s Bill of Rights,” (15 *Israel Yearbook on Human Rights* 113 [1985]). Prof. Gavison also raises the argument that Israel has ably protected individual rights without a Constitution — in part because of the “liberal” Jewish heritage. See generally, M. Konvitz, *Judaism and the American Idea*.

6. Foundations of Law 5740-1980, Laws of the State of Israel 34:181.

7. E.g., H.C. 262/62 *Peretz v. Kfar Shmaryahu* 16 Piskai Din 2101 at 2113 (protecting freedom of religion); H.C. 301/63 *Streit v. Chief Rabbi* 18 Piskai Din (I) 598 at 612 (protecting equality of treatment); and H.C. 73/53 *Kol Ha’am v. Minister of the Interior* 7 Piskai Din 871 at 884 (protecting freedom of the press).

New Light on the Early Years of Christianity

Review-Essay by Phillip J. Sigal

Between Jesus and Paul. By MARTIN HENGEL, tr. John Bowden. Philadelphia. Fortress Press, 1983. xxx 220 pp.

Jesus in Focus. A Life in its Setting. By GERARD S. SLOYAN, Mystic, Conn. Twenty-Third Publications. 212 pp.

THE TWO BOOKS UNDER REVIEW ARE wholly unlike one another. Hengel's is not about either Jesus or Paul. Rather, it is an erudite attempt to discover the process by which the Christian church emerged out of its matrix "between Jesus and Paul," that is, the first thirty years of its existence, 30-60, a relatively obscure period for which the only contemporary documents are Paul's letters. Sloyan's is primarily about Jesus and is basically a popular work, sometimes even somewhat apologetic. Yet, for those interested in Judaic-Christian theological dialogue, the Sloyan book earns empathy.

I.

Hengel seeks to locate the origin of Christology as it is crystallized in Paul's thought and to explain the role in this of the Greek-speaking Jewish messianic group in Jerusalem to which the Book of Acts draws our attention. The process happily leads the author to attribute far more historical competence to Luke than is often found in current scholarship, although he still does not reach the conclusion that I have, that Luke was Jewish and understood Judaism as well as Matthew, and even, in some instances, recorded it more authentically. His view of Acts leads Hengel to posit for us a useful corrective concerning whether so-called "Hellenistic syncretistic" elements in the early church were of pagan or of Jewish Hellenistic derivation. He is correct in de-emphasizing the pagan influences and drawing attention to Jewish Hellenism, which was present in Palestine and even in Jerusalem.

In general, I find little to fault in Hengel's presentation of the broad picture of the rise of the early church. He expresses a sophisticated understanding of both early Christianity and post-exilic and proto-rabbinic Judaism (to be distinguished from so-called "Pharisaism") when

The late PHILLIP J. SIGAL was an expert on the relations of Judaism and early Christianity.

he writes that earliest Christianity grew completely out of ancient Judaism and . . . it is difficult to demonstrate direct pagan influences in it which have not been communicated through the intermediary of Judaism. . . . (p. xiv). This is a view that my own researches continually reinforce, and is a view that would do well to become the basic premise of interreligious dialogue between Judaic and Christian theologians.

A very significant crux in any discussion of the route taken by early Christianity between Jesus and Paul is Acts 6:1. In this verse we are told that, as the movement grew, dissension developed between *hellenistai* (Greek-speaking disciples) and *hebraioi* (the Hebrew-Aramaic-speaking disciples). The latter must have been in the majority, controlled the group, and discriminated against the Greek-speaking members. The solution was to establish a group of seven in typical style of the "seven leaders of a town" known to us from rabbinic literature (B. Meg. 26a). These "seven good men" would administer the society of believers (Acts 6:3-4). It was then that Stephen emerged as a leader. It appears that, as a consequence of both the newly-established unity and Stephen's leadership, the Jesus movement grew considerably and even attracted "a great crowd" of priests (v.7).

Contrary to most scholars, Hengel sees these "Hellenists" as Palestinian Jews. He infers that they were all Jewish from the naming of the leaders (v. 5) and from the fact that in only the last case is the person described as not being a Jew but, rather, an Antiochian proselyte. That the six named before the last one, the proselyte, were Jewish is also clear from Acts 7:2 where Stephen is clearly identified as a Jew. The inference, then, that the five who follow him were Jewish is quite valid or one or more of them would have been distinguished as a pagan as the last one was a proselyte. Hengel persuasively shows that the Greek word used for "hellenists" had a linguistic meaning and did not refer to "paganizing" or introducing Hellenistic syncretism but, rather, simply meaning, at least until after the third century, "to speak Hellenic," [i.e., Greek]. Thus, too, the term "Hebrew-speaking" [for which read also "Aramaic"] signifies only a linguistic sense and does not contrast the Greek-speaking as "Gentiles" and the Hebrew-speaking as Jews. This juxtaposition of Greek-speaking and Hebrew or Aramaic-speaking persons as "Hellenists" and "Hebraists" is also found as *yevani* and *ibri* in Mishnah *Gittin* 9:6, 8, where, manifestly, the witness to the *get* who is described as a *yevani* would not be a Gentile. Furthermore, that same Mishnah clearly identifies a Jew by saying *yisrael* and a Gentile by *oved kokhahim*.

Stephen made a masterful "Jewish" speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:2-53). No Gentile would have made that speech, so completely identifying himself with "our father Abraham", "our fathers" in reference to the sons of Jacob, "our tribe" in reference to the Israelites in Egypt, and "our fathers" in reference to those who entered Canaan. Stephen also evinces familiarity with midrashic traditions not found in the Exodus

account of Moses, such as his great knowledge of all Egyptian wisdom, that he was forty years old when he associated himself with his brethren in Egyptian bondage and spent forty years in Midianite exile. He contrasts Israel "our fathers" with Gentiles or the "ethnics" among whom Israel came to live. Stephen climaxes his speech by accusing the Sanhedrin of having a long history of persecuting prophets, which was a historical truism and might not have irritated them overmuch. But he gets into trouble by accusing them now of having murdered "the Just One," a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus.

The stoning of Stephen without a trial (Acts 7:58) has been compared to a lynching and many Jews see in this account a supposedly "anti-Semitic" passage. It is important, I think, to view so-called anti-Semitism in the New Testament from a new perspective, and to examine objectively the Judaic sources before passing judgment on New Testament statements. The crucial questions here are whether it would have been at all possible for this stoning to have occurred without the normal judicial processes having taken place, and whether Jews even engaged in such a practice. The answer to both questions is in the affirmative. In cases where it condones death without trial, Mishnah *Sanhedrin* provides, for example, for the possibility of shattering the skull of a priest who deliberately officiates while unclean (9:6). Boaz Cohen has further illuminated this subject for us in his discussion, "Self-Help in Jewish and Roman Law."¹ He indicates that, under the ancient halakhah, there was a justifiable homicide aside from self-defense in order to prevent crimes such as murder, adultery, incest and homosexuality (B. *San.* 73b-74a). Some scholars included such ritual matters as idolatry and the violation of the Sabbath. That this view was far older is seen in I Maccabees 2:26 where Mattathias carried it out in imitation of Phineas (Num. 25:8). Cohen sees these precedents as underlying the Mishnah's provisions. Finally, it can be pointed out that Philo, who, despite all his noble virtues, was capable of condoning lynch law, writes that, in cases of idolatry, "all who have a zeal for virtue should be permitted to exact the penalties offhand and with no delay, without bringing the offender before jury or council. . . ." (*Special Laws* I, 9[55]). Philo derives his lesson for lynch-law in idolatry from Phineas' act of zeal (Num. 25:7-15). The same unfortunate view was expressed in another writing of the same general period (III Maccabees 7:12,14).

It is difficult to know the basis for which Stephen might legitimately be put to death without a trial since none of the reasons given in M. *San.* 9:6 apply to him. Scholars have suggested that it was for blasphemy but we do not find Stephen blaspheming. On the other hand, false witnesses claimed that he did blaspheme (Acts 6:11-13). Scholars have further suggested, therefore, that this charge is based on the climactic ending of his

1. *Jewish and Roman Law*, Vol. II, Chap. 20, pp. 624-650.

speech. There Stephen, speaking to circles which believed fervently that God himself revealed the Torah to Moses, loosely said that the Torah was given by angels. With this, some argue, he might have unwittingly convinced the judges that the testimony of his blasphemy was, indeed, true. Nevertheless, this argument is rather weak, for Stephen here shows familiarity with traditions that we also find in Paul, that the angels were involved in the giving of the Torah. But these traditions go back to Deut. 33:2, which seems to suggest that myriads of angels were involved in the theophany of Sinai. This idea is found in Jubilees and in the later midrash *Pesikta Rabbati* which might, on the face of it, record an early tradition. It appears, therefore, that M. San. 9:6 merely cites some examples in which the death penalty was given without a trial, implying that, in other cases that were considered a "clear and present danger" to communal faith, the same unfortunate process might be indulged.

That is all very important to both Christians and Jews. If this brief summary of the incident which, except for a few particulars generally agrees with Hengel, is correct, some major conclusions emerge: the earliest Jesus movement was entirely Judaic and Hellenistic Jews accounted for the so-called Hellenistic elements in the faith of the early Gentile church of the diaspora. With the stoning of Stephen the movement was broken up in Jerusalem and was scattered throughout Judah and Samaria. The Hebrew-speaking movement, soon to be led by James, the brother of Jesus, was not left undisturbed (e.g., Acts 12) but Hellenists who remained in Judah became assimilated to the Christian Judaism of the Hebrew-speaking movement. Other Hellenists passed on to develop the Gentile church in Samaria, Syria, and beyond, westward into Egypt and northward into Asia Minor. Soon, Paul, having had a mystical experience on his way to Damascus, reversed himself from being a persecutor of the movement to becoming a leading apostle (Acts 9).

Though it would be useful to critique Hengel's cursory examination of early Christian worship, it is impossible to do justice to the subject here. In the effort to attribute Christologically oriented originality to the worship of the early Jesus movement, Hengel presses interpretations of verses a little too tightly. Thus, in seeking to emphasize that the messianic "new song" (Ps. 149:1) is meant, he argues that, in the early church, the Holy Spirit inspired new hymnody. He reads Colossians 3:16 as saying ". . . teach and admonish one another with psalms inspired by the spirit, and hymns and songs in a state of grace. . . ." The verse does not read this way in the Greek. Rather, it should be read, ". . . teaching and admonishing yourselves in all wisdom, in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing with grace in your hearts. . . ." First, it should be noted that the Psalmist of II Samuel 23:2 also claimed that the spirit of God spoke through him as he sang his psalm. And, second, the latter reading of Col. 3:16 can indicate that Paul has in mind traditional [Jewish] psalms and hymns, but adds that, where the pagans wish to introduce their familiar

melodies, these be done in a spiritual way. An analogy would be peasant folk-songs taken over by Hasidim and put to spiritual lyrics. The same construction can be placed upon a similar sentence in Ephesians 5:19. Hengel should have recognized this as he later aptly recognizes that the fragments of hymns that might be embodied in Hebrews 1:4-13 are all from Judaic sources. The testimony of Hebrews, which is clearly liturgical and midrashic, reveals that the content of early church worship was suffused with Judaic materials and did not rely upon "new songs" inspired by the Holy Spirit. True, at Revelations 5:9 a "new song" is depicted in a hymn exalting Jesus but that is a mystical description of a scene in heaven, and reflects a period later than the thirty years to which Hengel is addressing himself. None of the fragmentary hymns cited in the Epistle of Paul refers to a "new song" conveying the notion that "old songs" are inadequate.

Nevertheless, Hengel is on target in showing that the early church developed hymnody to Jesus that mainly referred to the salvation accomplished by his death and resurrection. A stricture is in order here, however, for this hymnody cannot be attributed to the church "between Jesus and Paul" since, as Hengel himself recognizes, the consensus of New Testament scholarship places this material somewhere between 40 and 100, hardly attesting to a major Christological liturgy prior to the death of Paul. Moreover, as Hengel also recognizes, when we get to a time when we really know something about the Christian liturgy, after the time of Justin (mid-second-century), it has been oriented to the synagogue model.

There is, furthermore, a certain tension within Hengel's approach. He is striving to identify the uniqueness of the early church's approach to worship by contrasting it with what he calls "Pharisaic synagogue worship." And, yet, he realizes that the Dead Sea Scrolls prove that there was a highly developed hymnody in Palestinian Judaism before the birth of Jesus. Here Hengel is off the mark because, first, he is blurring "Pharisees," overlooking the possible identity between Pharisees and the people of Qumran. And, second, he is blurring the time sequence. Until 70 C.E. there was a prolific instrumental and vocal music in the Temple in Jerusalem, and we have no idea what went on in synagogues in Palestine. We do know from Philo, however, that diaspora synagogues engaged in hymnody and we know that Qumran had much hymnody. Thus, between 30-60 the Christian mode would hardly have been unique. As for the later *rabbinic* synagogue (not "Pharisaic"), music was suppressed either in response to the destruction of Jerusalem, or, perhaps, as an anti-Christian gesture. Certainly a new group will introduce some new emphases and, in the Christian case, it might have been the "speaking in tongues" (Acts 2:3-11). Yet, even this might be overstated. All it might really mean is that each person in that cosmopolitan congregation in Jerusalem received the Holy Spirit in his or her own language, an idea referring back to the Sinaitic revelation which was believed to have been

uttered in seventy languages. In other words, the first Christian Pentecost (*Shavuot*) experience was seen in the light of the first Israelite Pentecost experience at Sinai.

In the light of the foregoing I have great difficulty in understanding Hengel's radical judgment that there was "... created a fundamental difference between earliest Christian worship and the ordering of synagogue worship" (p. 91). On the contrary, as I have shown in an article on the affinities between early Christian worship and rabbinic liturgy (*N.T. Studies*, Jan. 1984), the two orders of worship had a great deal in common.

II.

The second book under consideration, Slovan's *Jesus in Focus*, is of a far different type. It is directed to a popular audience and presupposes that the gospels reflect the faith in Jesus of the late first century. This is obviously an easier task than the one assumed by Hengel. The work leaves me with mixed feelings. The author has certainly attempted an objective portrayal of Jesus. He is fair to the Judaic contemporaries of Jesus, sometimes even sounding like a Jewish apologist. But, unfortunately, he too frequently overgeneralizes and is often weak in his Judaica, sometimes even erring in his interpretations. He perpetuates certain stereotypes and overlooks the fact that contemporary scholarship has begun to chip away at some of them. These include the identity of the Pharisees, and the extent of the difference between the human and Jewish Jesus of Nazareth before his crucifixion and his contemporaries, the proto-rabbis.

I shall examine only a few items where the unwary reader might derive erroneous information. Slovan refers to Tiberias as the place where "the Mishnah and the Gemara² were written — the *earliest* collections of the rabbinic *commentary* on the Bible — and the Palestinian Talmud *codified* (italics mine) (p. 12). One cannot speak of the Mishnah or the Gemara² as "written" in any sense of the word, and certainly not at Tiberias. The Mishnah was a loose, long-evolving collection of *logia* or sayings and *halakhot* that were ultimately collected from the disciples of different schools, beginning with the obscure time of Yosi ben Yoezer, through the Bet Shammai-Bet Hillel days, perhaps all in Jerusalem, later in Yabneh, and Usha. As for the Palestinian Talmud, Caesarea probably played a greater role than did Tiberias. Further, the Talmud was never "codified." It was collected, compiled in a disjointed fashion which, by modern standards, and even by ancient ones, cannot even be considered edited, and, perhaps, brought into its present, unedited form at Tiberias. Finally, they were not "the earliest collection of rabbinic commentary on the Bible" for neither Mishnah nor Gemara² served that purpose. Midrash is commentary on the Bible, and while the Talmud contains a²gadic commentary akin to midrash, the Mishnah is not a commentary at all, nor is the Gemara² a commentary on the Bible. The Gemara², if it is to be con-

sidered a commentary, is a commentary on the Mishnah and the *beraitot*, most of which are gathered in the Tosefta².

Sloyan can be faulted for both anachronism and error in a statement such as, "The Dead Sea community has left us scrolls which indicate that, while passionately devoted to the law and the prophets, the community members were no more concerned with rabbinic decisions than Jesus was" (p.20). Both anachronism and error are involved in the reference to "rabbinic decisions" in an age prior to the existence of the "rabbinic" institution. Furthermore, we have no way of knowing to what extent the Pharisaic pietists of Qumran had their own oral torah since the place and the sect were overwhelmed during the Jewish war against the Romans, 66-73, and, consequently, unlike the later rabbis, were never in a position to collect their writings. And, finally, there is adequate evidence in the teachings of Jesus in all four Gospels that he was, indeed, interested in the same midrashic approach to scripture, both a²gadic and halakhic, as were his proto-rabbinic contemporaries.

Another example of this type of error in Judaica is the generalization (p.22) that "The priestly group, the Sadducees, were not interested in the development of the oral law." Again, some research in this matter reveals that there was, indeed, a Sadducean halakhah, and that this group was not at all simply fundamentalistic biblicist in character. Furthermore, even in reference to his main theme, Jesus, Sloyan misses the mark. He refers to him as one not "learned in the law." It would appear rather curious for one not learned in scripture and tradition to have preached the many sermons or delivered the many lectures, the rubrics of which are collected in the Sermon on the Mount with all of their targumic and midrashic allusions as well as innovative interpretive midrash, or what might be considered the original contributions to oral torah by proto-rabbi Jesus. The crowds were not "astonished" at Jesus' teachings (Mt. 7:28) because they were surprised that this unlearned carpenter was so learned, but because they did not know where Jesus had been for some eighteen years. They remembered him only as "the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James" (Mk.6:3), and now he appeared as a proto-rabbinic lecturer and charismatic preacher. When they recognized that he "taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Mt. 7:29), we must remember that the *soferim* were often only just that, scribal functionaries and often teachers of children. They are not necessarily to be equated with the proto-rabbinic figures known as *hakhamim*. If we accept Luke as presenting good historical tradition, as I think he does, we read that his own townspeople in Nazareth at first had a feeling of pride in the development of the carpenter's son (Lk. 4:22) until Jesus' sermon proved to be irritating.

There are other errors and misleading generalizations that one can point to in this otherwise sensitive and well-written little book, but it should also be pointed out that Sloyan has many perceptive insights. He

understands the Gospel of John correctly as a Judaic midrash (p. 83), and that although John, chap. I sees Jesus as infused with divinity as the incarnated *logos*, for John (as is also true of Paul), God and Jesus are always distinct. The identity of Jesus as God is post-New Testament. Sloyan's sensitivity is potently reflected in his comments on Christianity and sex (p. 128) where he states that

... no one can ever know the suffering that single people have endured, and the married, and the divorced, and the lonely, in the name of Jesus' teaching about marriage and divorce, about sex and children.

Here I would interpose some demurrers. Studies indicate that the Roman Catholic prohibition of divorce and the institution of compulsory celibacy might not be attributable to Jesus. Thus, while Paul furthered the interpretation of Jesus which led to the prohibition of divorce as found in Mark, there are good reasons to wonder whether Paul really taught this prohibition or that he favored mandatory celibacy for the clergy, or for the later-developed orders of women. Why Luke (16:18), who received his traditions from Paul, omitted Jesus' permission for divorce in cases of unchastity (the Hebrew *e'rvah*; Mt. 5:31-32; 19:9) is difficult to ascertain, except perhaps that Luke thought it to be self-evident on the basis of Deut. 24:1-4 that divorce was an option in cases of *e'rvah*, and he was stating Jesus' halakhah in the context of where there was no *e'rvah*. As for Mark (Mt. 10:11), on the basis of scholarship which places him after Luke, his prohibition of divorce was based upon a misunderstanding of Luke's intent. While Paul had a pietistic attitude toward sex, seeing it as a temptation (I Cor. 7:2), he did not require celibacy but, rather, promoted monogamous marriage. It is my view that while Paul was opposed to the "separation" of a wife from a husband (I Cor. 7:10), he did not necessarily prohibit divorce. The Greek word that he uses is not the same technical word as used in the Gospels for "divorce" when he says a man should not "leave" his wife (I Cor. 7:11).

There are many other elements in Sloyan's work concerning Jesus' self-perception, the resurrection doctrine, the crucifixion episode, the Judaic nature of Paul's theology and Christology, and the role of the later predominantly gentile church in projecting a new Jesus (and also a new Paul) that I would be eager to discuss here but which the limitations of space prohibit. Sloyan appreciates the difficulty imposed by popular religion upon Christian theology when he writes "... [Christians] made a mistake quite their own by saying, as a matter of popular religion, that Jesus Christ was God walking the earth in the body of a man" (p.172). Similarly, Sloyan takes a large step toward the possibility of ecumenical dialogue with Jews when he indicates (p. 174) that "Any relation between a human being and the creator God that is described in the language of human begetting is metaphorical." This was surely Philo's understanding of the birth of Isaac by the intervention of the holy spirit, one of the possi-

ble sources of the concept of divine conception in the New Testament. Sloyan's chapters, "The Son of God" and "The Three Who Are God," are courageous efforts to interpret difficult Christian dogma in a way that can improve interreligious dialogue. Jews would, indeed, do well to rethink their disdain for the concepts of Jesus as son of God and the Trinity by a fresh approach to the authentic teaching of these ideas and an eschewal of the popular misconception inherent in both doctrines. What Sloyan writes, albeit too cursorily, is helpful.



Lot's Wife

CAROL MOLDAW

It's true I didn't want to go, and true
I turned mid-step then stared, stunned by the knife-
sharp blast, the sting of wind, as God withdrew
my breath, drew back my blood — depleting life
till salt was all the body I had left.

But, Lord, what woman doesn't look behind
her as she walks, what woman doesn't shift
her level gaze and know her life consigned
to crystallize in dread? I know my sin.
No fear of God eclipsed my fear of men.

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The Christian Responsibility in Anti-Semitism

Review-Essay by **ROBERT A. EVERETT**

Mature Christianity: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament. By NORMAN BECK. Selinsgrove, Pa., Susquehanna University Press, 1985. 325 pp.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE NEW TESTAMENT to the development and justification of antisemitism in the Christian tradition is one of the most troubling issues facing Christian participants in the modern Jewish-Christian dialogue. The very question tends to create an uproar in certain circles as being outrageous, misguided and, to some, blasphemous. The commonplace excuse for the New Testament is that Christians have justified anti-Jewish ideas on the basis of a serious misreading of the New Testament texts. Scholars such as Markus Barth, Krister Stendahl, and Raymond Brown have all tried to defend the New Testament from charges of being inherently antisemitic, while still recognizing the problems posed by certain texts in creating anti-Jewish feelings among Christians. Samuel Sandmel is a Jewish scholar who has argued along similar lines.

On the other hand, Christian scholars like Rosemary Ruether, A. Roy Eckardt, and Gregory Baum have argued that Christians must face up to the unpleasant idea that, either in part or in its entirety, the New Testament has definite anti-Jewish overtones and contributes considerably to the antisemitic tradition of the Christian Church. According to Eckardt,

(t)hose who seek to declare the New Testament innocent of antisemitism are hard put to explain how New Testament Christianity could have become a foundation reference for Christian antisemitism throughout the ages. Every instance of Christian antisemitism in post-Biblical history is directly or indirectly traceable to the events or reputed events recorded in the New Testament.

Ruether, in arguing against those who claim that Christian antisemitism is merely a continuation of pagan antisemitism, states that it was the religious element in Christianity which found its expression in the New Testament as the antithesis between the Christian (man-in God) and the

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Jew (man alienated from God) which gave rise to antisemitism, particularly after Christianity became the imperial religion of the Western world. Ruether's contention that antisemitism is the "left hand of Christology" goes directly to the heart of the New Testament, since it is there that the Church finds the foundations of its Christological thinking. It is in the face of this rather complex and highly sensitive issue that Norman Beck attempts to find some solution for the problem.

Beck, an Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Texas Lutheran College, has done a remarkable job in examining what seems to be every possible text in the New Testament which could contribute in some small measure to the increase of anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians. He examines the New Testament book by book, and he gives an exhaustive treatment of certain texts and their historical, literary, and theological meaning. At times, his style becomes a bit tedious, and his point is sometimes lost in the mass of information that he presents, but that in no way takes away from the enormous amount of work and information found here.

Underlying Beck's approach is what I think to be both an ingenious and ingenuous thesis. He argues that it is rather commonplace to find in the Sacred Scriptures of religious communities a polemic against other religious groups, particularly if the communities writing the text are attempting to justify their existence against an older and more firmly established one. The polemic becomes even greater when one group literally springs out of an older one. To support his thesis, he looks at the polemical materials in the Hebrew Bible, the Greek New Testament, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the Divine Principle of the Unification Church and, in each case, he finds what he feels is evidence of such writings aimed at helping the new community sort out its own identity by attacks on its immediate antecedents. It is Beck's position that it is here that one can begin to understand the anti-Jewish polemics of the New Testament. For him, this discovery does not excuse Christianity for its anti-Jewish teachings. He is very sensitive to the history of Christian antisemitism, and the evil which has been perpetuated in its name. The question for Christians becomes, "What are Christians going to do about the anti-Jewish polemic found in its own scripture?" It is at this point that Christians have traditionally run into a problem because of the great authority that the New Testament has been given over Christian life. Beck does not evade the issue, but, rather, meets it head on by addressing the problem of authority and the New Testament.

His way of dealing with this issue of authority is most useful, if a bit unusual. He poses to the Christian the question, "Do our scriptural traditions have authority over us, or do we have authority over our scriptures?" While not denying the importance of scripture for the Christian life, he does make a very strong case against any effort to turn the scriptures into an infallible idol with ultimate authority. He makes the case that

there must be a dialectical relationship in which the Christian stands judge over scripture and scripture stands judge over the Christian. Relaxing either part of this dialectic leads to serious error.

He justifies this position by pointing out that the Christian community has been standing in judgment over its scriptures since the beginning. The very treatment by the early church of the Hebrew Bible, which was its original normative text, is a perfect illustration. Certain parts of Jewish scripture were seen as normative, while others were discarded. More than once, parts of the Hebrew Bible were given Christian meanings far removed from the original intent of the author. The history of Biblical interpretation reveals a wide variety of meanings given to the texts. The Church Fathers, the Reformers, and modern Christian interpreters have all felt that it was their right to judge Biblical texts as well as to be judged by them. Modern Christians have been particularly busy in the task of judging and selecting New Testament texts which no longer seem suitable for the Church. The work being done today to eliminate sexist language is the clearest example which we now have of such activity. Similar judgments have been passed on Biblical texts like Romans 13, which teaches that Christians should obey government authorities without question. Even the most fundamentalist interpreters tend to make such judgments despite their protests to the contrary. Beck argues that, in light of that responsibility, Christians have to stand in judgment over their scriptures. He writes that, "we can carefully and deliberately repudiate portions of our scriptural traditions that have proved to be deleterious to persons whether within or outside of the Christian community." This clearly applies to passages which engage in polemics against Jews.

The title of the book indicates Beck's basic thinking on the matter. As a religion matures, it must begin to discard the "child-like" polemics which it once directed against its "mother" religion. Radical self-criticism of one's own text is, for Beck, a sign of health and maturity in a religion. Given this position, he then wants to know what such a radical self-criticism of the texts would produce when applied to the following questions:

- a. Christianity's claim to have abrogated Judaism;
- b. Christianity's assertion that it has the universal, one way for all people, including the Jewish people; and
- c. Christianity's teaching of fulfilled messianism.

By employing a radical historical-literary form criticism of the entire New Testament, Beck attempts to identify those passages most polemical against Jews and offers a variety of solutions to dealing with them, reducing certain texts to footnote status; retranslating certain words throughout the New Testament (particularly the term "Pharisee" when it is used in a negative fashion); alternative lectionary selections; and explanatory commentaries on difficult and problematic texts. Beck clearly understands that such ideas will not be easily incorporated into the life of the

Church. It will take many years, he feels, for such changes to take place, and they must take place in the “market place” of ideas, not just in academic circles. Nonetheless, it behooves the Church to work at eliminating antisemitism from its midst.

Yet, the very bulk of Beck’s work illustrates how much work there is to be done. He identifies three major categories of anti-Jewish polemics in the New Testament: Christological; supersessionistic; and defamatory. The Christological passages are the least problematic, although I suspect that many in the Jewish-Christian dialogue would question that idea. Beck believes that Christians must maintain their belief that Jesus is Lord, but that such a proclamation need not negate Judaism nor defame the Jewish people. He makes some very interesting comments on how Jesus functions for Christians in the way that Yahweh functions for Jews, but he needs to develop these ideas more fully. The fact that Christians understand God through the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, however, cannot be denied. He points out that certain books in the New Testament which develop rather high Christologies are among those least polemical against Jews (James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude, and Hebrews. His inclusion of Hebrews is open to debate.) Beck is addressing Ruether directly here, but he really needs to develop this position more fully. The centrality of Christology to the New Testament is such that Beck can see no way seriously to change it in spite of its inherent anti-Jewish polemics. He argues that Christians in each generation need to interpret what it means to say that “Jesus is Lord.” He hopes that, in the future, this proclamation will be free of anti-Jewish sentiments. It is precisely this issue that Christian scholars like Ruether, Eckardt, Van Buren and Pawlikowski are trying to address.

Much more problematic, and in need of immediate attention, are those passages which are supersessionistic and defamatory. The supersessionist position claims that Judaism has been displaced by Christianity in God’s redemptive plan and that salvation is limited only to those who believe in Christ. There is an obvious point of connection between these two positions. The supersessionist position reduces Judaism to the role of preparer of the way for Christianity, but then it ceases to have any further spiritual value. Beck finds this polemic throughout the New Testament, but he thinks that the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are the most problematic in this regard.

For the writer of Acts it was the Jews who became the followers of Jesus who were truly Israel, the people of God, whereas those Jews who refused to follow Jesus thereby forfeited their membership in the people of God. Herein lies the essence of the anti-Jewish polemic in Acts, which is the most devastating and the most destructive of Judaism in all the New Testament documents. In the opinion of the writer of Acts, the Jews who repented of the sin that allegedly they had committed in crucifying Jesus and turned to become disciples of Jesus became Christians, and the Jews who would not repent and follow Jesus lost their right to be called the people of God.

Therefore they were lost to Judaism if they were baptized as Christians, and Judaism itself was lost if they were not. Either way, there was nothing left for Judaism. It was an empty shell to be discarded. The followers of Jesus were now the people of God (pp. 207-208.)

The Book of Acts is not usually so closely linked to the anti-Jewish tradition of the Church, so I found Beck's interpretation interesting and persuasive. What did surprise me was his rather benign attitude toward the Gospel of John, which he feels is less problematic than Luke/Acts. Surprising because John is considered by many to be quite anti-Jewish. Still, Beck makes some important points, his contention being that this sort of supersessionist polemic can be expected in a young community's writings, but we should be able to expect Christianity, as it matures, to give up such childish ideas.

The final category of anti-Jewish polemics is defamatory. This, says Beck, is the most dangerous category and the one which Christians are morally obligated to repudiate. It is this position which requires Christians to transcend their traditional theology in order to purge themselves of an evil lurking in their own tradition. In some of my own writings I have argued about the "Theology of Victimization" which characterizes much of Christianity's attitude toward Jews. This is very much a part of the defamatory polemic that Beck has identifies here. Without question, it is here that the decide charge has most intimately involved the Church in defamatory attacks upon the Jews as persons. Beck is clear that passages in the New Testament which contribute to defamatory polemics need to be totally repudiated, and he believes that this can be done without harming the essential message of Christianity. Not to do so endangers Jewish life and dehumanizes the Christian person. He is quick to point out that "official Christendom" has gone on record as repudiating such ideas, but he is correct when he points out that unless the Church deals with the theological roots of such polemics as are found in the New Testament itself, the Church will find itself in the curious position of theologically justifying something that it officially condemns.

Mature Christianity is in many ways an extraordinary book, and it deserves a wide audience. Certainly those concerned about Jewish-Christian relations and the role of the New Testament in the development of Christian antisemitism need to include it in their libraries. Beck has provided a great service for those engaged in the task of eliminating antisemitism from the Christian community. I hope that his message will be heeded by the Church.

BOOKS RECEIVED

October through December 1986

Listing of a book does not preclude its being reviewed in a subsequent issue of JUDAISM.

Anti-Semitism

Rosenberg, Stuart E. *The Christian Problem. A Jewish View*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1986. xii + 241 pp., \$15.95.

Autobiography and Biography

Bonner, Elena. *Alone Together*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986. 270 pp., \$17.95.

Eisenstein, Ira. *Reconstructing Judaism. An Autobiography*. New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1986. x + 242 pp. \$17.95.

Grade, Chaim. *My Mother's Sabbath Days. A Memoir*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986. xvi + 397 pp., \$19.95.

Hay, Peter. *Ordinary Heroes. Chana Szenes and the Dream of Zion*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986. 271 pp., \$22.50.

Rose, Norman. *Chaim Weizmann*. New York: Viking Press, 1986. xiv + 520 pp., \$24.95.

The Jerusalem Post. *Anatoly and Avital Scharansky. The Journey Home*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986. xv + 317 pp., \$15.95.

Bible

Fox, Everett, tr. with commentary. *Now These Are the Names. A new English rendition of the Book of Exodus*. New York: Schocken Books, 1983. xxxvii + 230 pp., \$16.95.

Preminger, Alex and Edward W. Greenstein, eds. *The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism*. New York: Ungar, 1986. xvi + 619 pp., \$65.00.

Bibliographies

Breslauer, S. Daniel. *Modern Jewish Morality. A Bibliographical Survey*. Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1986. x + 239 pp., \$39.95.

Frank, Ruth S. & William Wollheim. *The Book of Jewish Books. A Reader's Guide to Judaism*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986. xiv + 320 pp., \$19.95.

Christianity and Jewish/Christian Relations

Block, Walter. *The U. S. Bishops and Their Critics. An Economic and Ethical Perspective*. Vancouver, Canada: The Fraser Institute, 1986. ix + 127 pp., \$5.00 (paper).

Fisher, Eugene J., A. James Rudin and Marc H. Tanenbaum. *Twenty Years of Jewish-Catholic Relations*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986. 236 pp., \$11.95 (paper).

Tabor, James D. *Things Unutterable. Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-*

Roman, Judaic and Early Christian Contexts. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1986. 166 pp., \$11.50 (paper).

Customs

Lutske, Harvey. *The Book of Jewish Customs*. Northvale, N. J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1986. x + 383 pp., \$25.00.

Fiction

Bauer, Laurel. *Vertical Hold*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986. 276 pp., \$16.95.

Cheuse, Alan. *The Grandmothers' Club*. Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1986. 326 pp., \$18.95.

Schwartz, Howard. *Miriam's Tambourine*. Jewish Folktales from Around the World. New York: Free Press Seth, 1986. xxxiii + 393 pp., \$24.95.

History

Biale, David. *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*. New York: Schocken Books, 1986. xi + 244 pp., \$18.95.

Rawidowicz, Simon. *Israel, The Ever Dying People*, ed. by Benjamin C. I. Ravid. Cranbury, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986. 247 pp., \$32.50.

Rockaway, Robert A. *The Jews of Detroit*. From the Beginning. 1762-1914. Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1986. xi + 162 pp., \$15.95.

Holocaust

Hillesum, Elly. *Letters from Westerbork*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. xviii + 156 pp., \$14.95.

Levkov, Lev, ed. *Bitburg and Beyond*. New York: Shapolsky Books, 1986. 734 pp., \$17.95 (paper).

Juvenile

Fischman, Joyce. *Holiday Work and Play*, rev. ed. New York: UAHC, 1986. 60 pp., \$5.00 (paper).

Language

Rauch, Maurice. *Yidish Iz Mayn Lid*. New York: Zhitlowsky Foundation, 1986. 117 pp. (paper).

Mysticism

Dan, Joseph, ed. *The Early Kabbalah*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986. 205 pp., \$10.95 (paper).

Midrash

Halivni, David Weiss. *Midrash, Mishnah and Gemara*. The Jewish Predilection for Justified Law. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986. 164 pp.

Passover

Bokser, Baruch M. *The Origins of the Seder*. The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism. Berkeley, Cal.: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1986. xix + 188 pp., \$7.95 (paper).

Philosophy

Novak, David and Norbert Samuelson, eds., *Creation and the End of Days*. Judaism and Scientific Cosmology. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, Inc., 1986. 336 pp., \$14.50 (paper).

Poetry

Brin, Ruth F. *Harvest: Collected Poems and Prayers*. New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1986. xviii + 246 pp.

Harshov, Benjamin and Barbara. *American Yiddish Poetry*, A Bilingual Anthology. Berkeley, Cal: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1986. xxv + 813 pp., \$55.00.

Scheindlin, Raymond P. *Wine, Women and Death*. Medieval Hebrew Poems and the Good Life. Philadelphia: JPS, 1986. x + 204 pp., \$15.95 (paper).

Psychoanalysis

Green, Harold J. *The Eternal We*. Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press, 1986. xxi + 324 pp., \$15.95.

Leonard, Linda Schierse. *On the Way to the Wedding*. Boston: Shambhala, 1986. 261 pp., \$15.95.

Religion

ibn Daud, Abraham. *The Exalted Faith*. Tr. with commentary by Norbert N. Samuelson. Cranbury, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1986. 406 pp., \$75.00.

Marty, Martin. *Modern American Religion*. Vol. 1. The Irony of It All. 1895-1919. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986. 386 pp., \$24.95.

Synagogue

Wigoder, Geoffrey, *The Story of the Synagogue*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986. 208 pp., \$35.00.